

BEST SPORTS CITIES

SEE A DIFFERENT GAME

Sporting News

MAGAZINE

NHL
121 EXPERTS
PICK THE
50
BEST PLAYERS

398 BURGS,

1

Pittsburgh

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PUT THE CHAMPS BACK IN
CITY OF CHAMPIONS

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Week of October 12, 2009

17

PAGES OF BASEBALL

PLAYOFF PREVIEW	IT'S YANKEES IN '09 PHILLIES IN '10?	YOGI BERRA CONVERSATION
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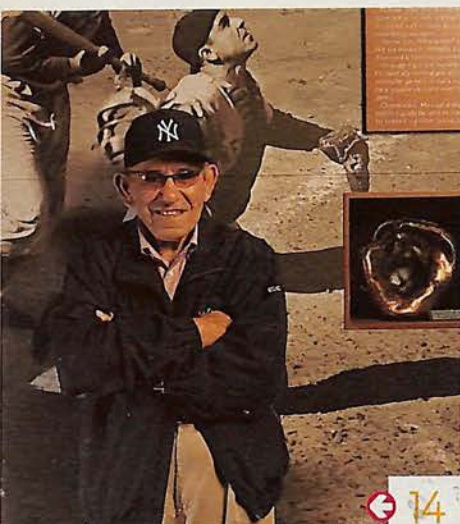
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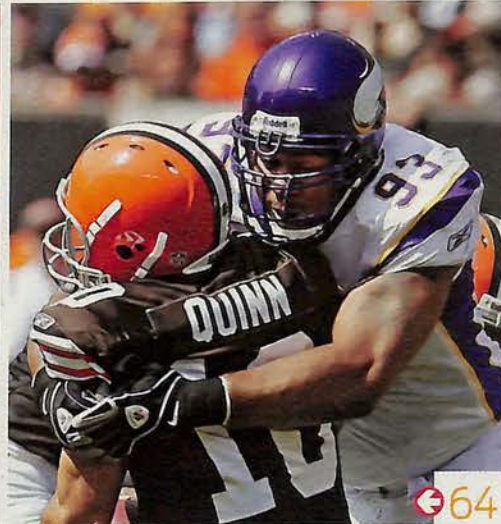
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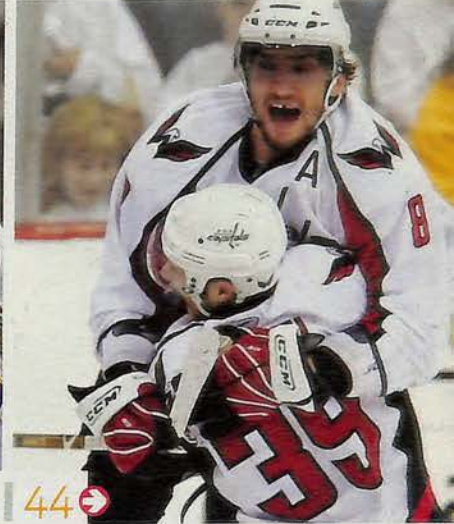
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COVER



32 Black and Gold mettle

Two championship teams make Pittsburgh SN's 2009 Best Sports City. "The devotion of our city's fans—and how so many of them use sports as a release from the daily grind of life—is never lost on me," Pitt football coach and Steel City native Dave Wannstedt says.

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY DUANE RIEDER FOR SN

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FEATURES

14 SN CONVERSATION: Yogi Berra

Like deja vu all over again, the legendary Yankees catcher talks about contemporary baseball, 60 years of marriage and, of course, his knack for memorable quotations: "It just comes out. I don't even know I say these things." —BY STEVE GREENBERG

20 BASEBALL PLAYOFF PREVIEW: Best of 7

There are four reasons to pick the Yankees to win it all and three not to, so we're sticking with the Bronx Bombers. The tiebreaker may just turn out to be chemistry: "A lot of guys are being themselves," pitcher A.J. Burnett says. "That's what makes good chemistry happen." In the N.L., the defending champion Phillies are loaded for the long haul, and the Cardinals are getting help in unlikely places. Plus, four pages of rankings, predictions and Scouts' Views to get you ready for the postseason.

44 NHL: 2 out of 3 ain't bad

A panel of 121 experts ranked the top 50 players in hockey, and a pair of Penguins landed near the top. Hall of Fame Penguins legend Mario Lemieux—not surprisingly—is fond of the choice at No. 1, Sidney Crosby: "The fact that he led us to the Stanley Cup as a 21-year-old captain tells you everything you need to know."

PHOTOS

52 Running with the Heels

Butch Davis led the Miami Hurricanes and coached in the NFL. How is his latest gig—turning around the North Carolina football program—going? To show you, SN spent an all-access week with the Tar Heels. —PHOTOS BY BOB LEVERONE

SportingNews MAGAZINE

WILL PUJOLS BE THE PLAYERS' CHOICE ... AGAIN?

The votes are in from 338 players, 22 managers and 31 executives, and we're ready to unveil our annual MLB award winners. Will Albert Pujols become the first repeat player of the year pick since the Reds' Joe Morgan in 1975-76? Pick up the next issue to find out.

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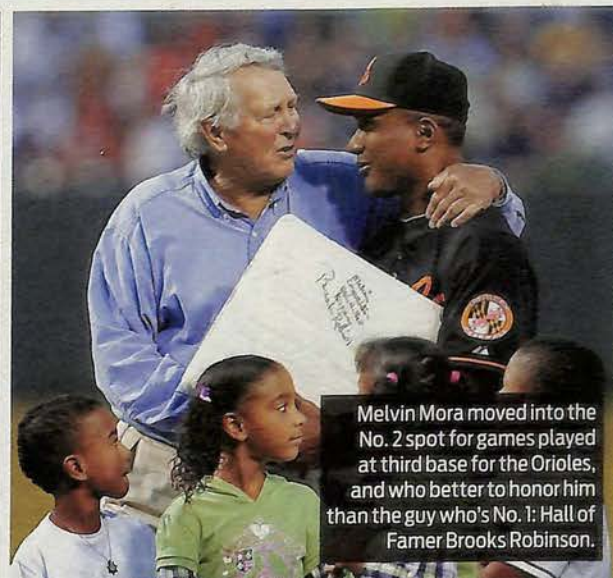
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IN PICTURES



Hall of Famer "Deacon" Jones was preaching to the choir—which is to say Rams fans—when his No. 75, though worn in Los Angeles from 1961-71, was retired in St. Louis. A long overdue honor? Amen.



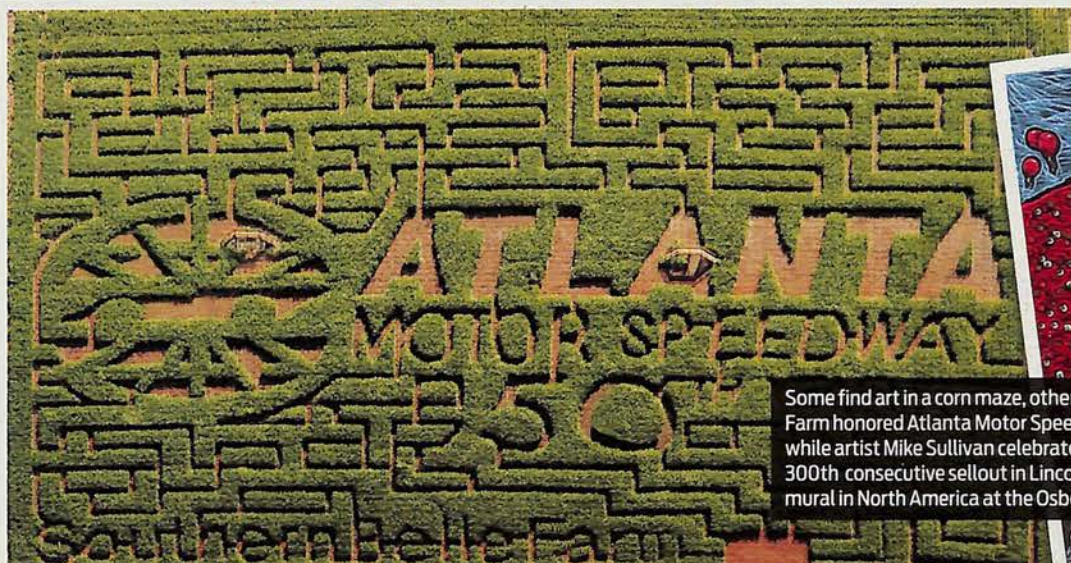
Melvin Mora moved into the No. 2 spot for games played at third base for the Orioles, and who better to honor him than the guy who's No. 1: Hall of Famer Brooks Robinson.



Before the Largest Custard Pie Fight during Guinness World Record Breaker Week on *Live with Regis and Kelly*, NASCAR driver Kasey Kahne and host Kelly Ripa donned slickers, the sweets-slingin' version of a HANS device.



Grizzlies rookie Hasheem Thabeet had a ball in his home country, serving as a "Right To Play" ambassador and visiting Uhuru Wasichana Primary School in Tanzania.



Some find art in a corn maze, others in a Cornhusker. Southern Belle Farm honored Atlanta Motor Speedway's 50th anniversary (left), while artist Mike Sullivan celebrated Nebraska football's record 300th consecutive sellout in Lincoln by unveiling the largest tile mural in North America at the Osborne Athletic Complex.

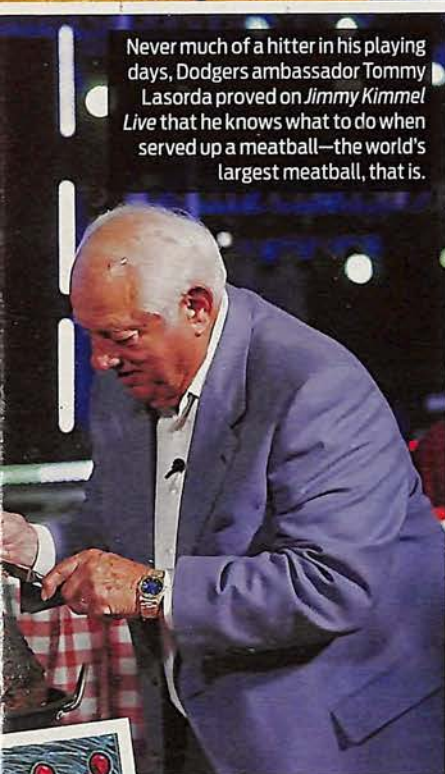




Eagles quarterback Michael Vick, who says his life has changed, proved it in one tangible way when he spoke out against dogfighting at Covenant Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.



When the football team at Oaks Christian High of Westlake Village, Calif., traveled to Sammamish, Wash., to play Skyline, the crowd had a Hall of Fame feel to it. Among the Oaks Christian parents: Wayne Gretzky (far left) next to wife Janet Jones and Joe Montana (far right) beside wife Jennifer Wallace.



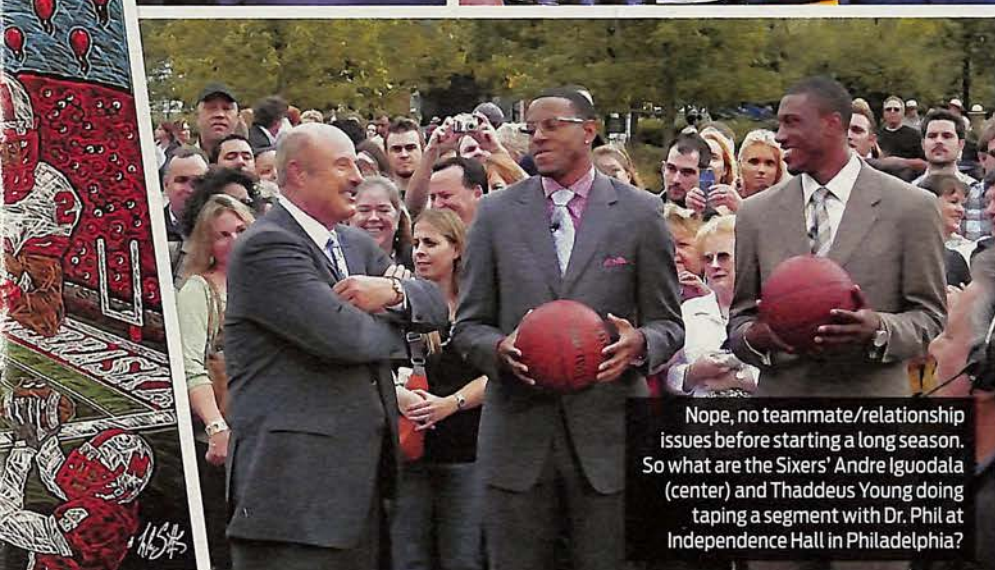
Never much of a hitter in his playing days, Dodgers ambassador Tommy Lasorda proved on *Jimmy Kimmel Live* that he knows what to do when served up a meatball—the world's largest meatball, that is.



Dwight Howard (right), meet Dwight Schrute. OK, actually that's actor Rainn Wilson as a different, out-of-*The Office* character during filming of promo ads for *The NBA* on TNT.



Think Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor is a huge Yankees fan? Check out that smile as she was escorted onto the field by Jorge Posada to throw out a ceremonial first pitch, then you be the judge.



Nope, no teammate/relationship issues before starting a long season. So what are the Sixers' Andre Iguodala (center) and Thaddeus Young doing taping a segment with Dr. Phil at Independence Hall in Philadelphia?



When mascots (from left) Bailey of the Kings, Slapshot of the Capitals, Carlton of the Maple Leafs and Stanley C. Panther of ... well, you know ... were on *The Price Is Right*, the price was definitely right: They were giving away NHL tickets and trips to their teams' cities.

SINCE YOU ASKED ...

You have questions, we have answers

Write us

It's like *Jeopardy!* All letters to the editor must be phrased in the form of a question, even if it's "Who says Pittsburgh is the best sports city?" We'll choose our favorites and answer them every issue in this space. E-mail your questions to jdalessio@sportingnews.com, along with your name and hometown.

YOUR QUESTION

Jacory Harris' early play gives me hope that the Miami Hurricanes may finally have their next great QB. I'd be curious to know whether one of the Miami greats of yesteryear feels likewise.

— Vince Anderson, Phoenix

YOUR QUESTION

Donald Brashear is going to bring some much-needed toughness to the Rangers this season. Who would he say is the best brawler in hockey?

— Milt Jenkins, Paterson, N.J.

YOUR QUESTION

How does the Braves' Martin Prado approach each day when he shows up to play not knowing what position he will take the field at?

— Drew Lyness, Signal Mountain, Tenn.

YOUR QUESTION

Aside from getting used to the speed of the game, what was the biggest adjustment the Eagles' DeSean Jackson had to make at the pro level last year?

— Adam Evarts, Los Lunas, N.M.

YOUR QUESTION

The Royals haven't had a Cy Young award winner since David Cone in 1994, but Zack Greinke could end that drought. Which pitcher from the past is he reminiscent of, and how good are his Cy Young chances?

— Martin Black, Independence, Mo.

THEIR ANSWER

Steve Walsh

QB on Miami's '87 title team

Vince,

This summer, I popped in on my former teammate, (Canes coach) Randy Shannon, and he shared with me a story of how Jacory will challenge his teammates if they are not doing the right things on or off the field. He has the confidence as a leader to do that. That locker room respects him for it and will kill for him. Sounds a little like someone else in the state. He has two things you love in your QB—poise and leadership. His accuracy doesn't hurt, either.

THEIR ANSWER

Donald Brashear

121 penalty minutes in 2008-09

Milt,

It would probably be Zdeno Chara of the Boston Bruins. His size (6-9, 255) combined with his strength—those are two things you look for in a brawler. It is mostly the bigger guys, the taller guys, who give me the most trouble. They have the advantage because they have long arms. They will reach out and keep you from getting a good grasp on them.

THEIR ANSWER

Martin Prado

Has played 1B, 2B, 3B in '09

Drew,

I usually arrive at the park around 2 p.m., and that's when I see the lineup. I usually go through some stretching and warmup exercises, then I watch video on that night's opposing pitcher. Then I go into the indoor cage and work on a game plan for how I want to approach the pitcher. By the time we take batting practice outside, I already have my strategy worked out for the game, and I make sure to get fielding reps at whatever position I'm playing.

THEIR ANSWER

DeSean Jackson

Eagles' leading receiver in '08

Adam,

It's just the everyday things that make it like a real job. A lot of people think we just go out there and play games, but the weekly schedule is crazy. I didn't realize that coming in, the everyday hard work you have to put in. That's something I had to work on. In college, being one of the best players, I could get away with some things. But in the NFL, you're just one of many greats, so you've got to put in the work every day.

THEIR ANSWER

Paul Splittorff

Royals' career wins leader

Martin,

With Kansas City, he reminds me of Bret Saberhagen. Sabes had a better changeup; Zack has a better curveball and slider. They have similar velocity and command. Both are great defensively and throwing to the bases. Both are great athletes, too—they could have been middle infielders. The Cy Young award is a two-horse race between Zack and (Detroit's) Justin Verlander. Verlander has been equally dominant.



Get What Fits.

STATE YOUR CASE

The Lakers and the art of Artest's arrival

Posted by: The Forum Club on SportingNews.com

Summer vacation is over and it's time for the kids to go back to school. The Lakers enjoyed their first championship summer since 2002, and now it's time to get down to the business of repeating as NBA champions.

The team brings back the same roster that won the title in June except for Ron Artest replacing Trevor Ariza, a move whose success or failure won't be determined until June. As Artest recently opined, if the team does not repeat then the failure falls squarely on him.

The biggest challenge for Artest

won't be his play on the court but rather what his combustible personality adds to the locker room and whether it affects team chemistry. Make no mistake about it, Artest will have his moments this season in which he'll go off the deep end. But with a strong leader in Kobe Bryant and a coach in Phil Jackson who is well-equipped to handle Ron-Ron, he will play his role and should thrive with this Lakers team.

To see more of The Forum Club's blog, and many others, read the community blogs at sportingnews.com.



Once rivals, Bryant and Artest should thrive as teammates.

BRYANT, ARTEST: NOAH GRAHAM / GETTY IMAGES



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MY PROFILE

(What you won't find on Facebook ... even if you are approved as a friend)

Patrick Kerney

Seahawks two-time Pro Bowl defensive end

- **Born:** December 30, 1976, in Trenton, N.J.
- **Status:** Engaged
- **Alma mater:** Virginia
- **What's on TV:** *Arrested Development*, *The Office*
- **What's in my iPod:** Bruce Springsteen, Led Zeppelin, David Gray, the Eagles, The Police, The Killers, Guns N' Roses, Pink Floyd, Band of Horses
- **What I drive:** 1996 black Ford Bronco
- **Favorite flicks:** *Rushmore*, *Waiting for Guffman*, *Bottle Rocket*, *Miracle*
- **Bookmarks:** foxnews.com, cnn.com, nfl.com
- **Worst habit:** Let's just call it "my extreme nature."
- **On my office walls:** 1. Four pictures of P. Kerney, the horse, in the winner's circle. He was born to a friend of mine from high school who thought it would be funny to name the horse after me. 2. Other pictures of family and friends.
- **Love to trade places for a day with ...** Christopher Columbus, the day he saw land. I can't imagine a greater feeling of accomplishment.
- **First job:** Groundskeeper, Cape May Tennis Club, 13 years old. I swept and lined the courts two times a day, emptied garbage cans, watered plants and the lawn, etc. Made \$4.25/hr. I remember getting called out by my boss when I lied about finishing my day's work. Great lessons learned.
- **Talent I'd most like to have:** To play the piano
- **For dinner:** Flank steak. It's a family recipe that my fiancée has picked up. It tastes so good that it could be called a dessert.
- **Favorite athlete to watch in another sport:** Roger Federer
- **Favorite city to visit:** Charleston, S.C.
- **Favorite team as a kid:** Philadelphia Eagles
- **Favorite value in others:** Integrity
- **My greatest love:** My fiancée
- **My heroes:** Three-legged dogs
- **My bucket list:** 1. Skydive, 2. Do some mountain summiting
- **My motto:** Greatness usually lies just beyond fatigue.

—Jeff D'Alessio

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“I thought at my age there was nothing I could do about it, then I had ‘the talk’ with my doctor.”

Your Doctor Talks to Men About ED Every Day

Your doctor will tell you that there is something you can do about your erectile dysfunction (ED). In fact, millions of men over 40 have already taken the first step and talked to their doctor about ED. And so can you.



Doctor portrayal.

Running the Numbers

Did you know half of all guys over 40 have some form of ED? Here are some numbers to keep in mind from a recent survey of men with ED:



of men were anxious about talking to their doctor about ED.



of men felt relieved after talking to their doctor.

Need Some Ideas on How to Open Up to Your Doctor?

The hardest part about having ‘the talk’ is getting those first few words out. Here are some ideas to help you break the ice when your doctor asks how everything’s going:

The Direct Approach:
“I have trouble sometimes in bed. Could it be ED?”

The Indirect Approach:
“Is it true age affects sexual performance?”

The Silent Approach:
Just hand this ad to your doctor, he’ll take it from there.



Tell Me More

To learn more about VIAGRA for the treatment of ED, and ED in general, visit viagra.com today. You’ll find an online sexual health quiz, videos of guys with ED who’ve had the VIAGRA Talk and other helpful information.

Over 20 million men have already had their VIAGRA Talk. Isn’t it time you had yours?

Important Safety Information

We know that no medicine is for everyone. Don’t take VIAGRA if you take nitrates, often prescribed for chest pain, as this may cause a sudden unsafe drop in blood pressure.

Talk with your doctor first. Make sure your heart is healthy enough to have sex. If you have chest pain, nausea, or other discomforts during sex, seek medical help right away.

In the rare event of an erection lasting more than four hours, seek immediate medical help to avoid long-term injury.

In rare instances, men who take PDE5 inhibitors (oral erectile dysfunction medicines, including VIAGRA) reported a sudden decrease or loss of vision, or sudden decrease or loss of hearing. It is not possible to determine whether these events are related directly to these medicines or to other factors. If you experience any of these symptoms, stop taking PDE5 inhibitors, including VIAGRA, and call a doctor right away.

The most common side effects of VIAGRA are headache, facial flushing, and upset stomach. Less common are bluish or blurred vision, or being sensitive to light. These may occur for a brief time.

VIAGRA does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases including HIV.

Please see Important Facts for VIAGRA on the following page or visit viagra.com for full prescribing information.

For free information, including questions to ask your doctor, call 1-888-4VIAGRA (1-888-484-2472).

VIAGRA®
(sildenafil citrate) tablets

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IMPORTANT FACTS

VIAGRA®
(sildenafil citrate) tablets

(vi-AG-rah)

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION ABOUT VIAGRA

Never take VIAGRA if you take any medicines with nitrates. This includes nitroglycerin. Your blood pressure could drop quickly. It could fall to an unsafe or life-threatening level.

ABOUT ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION (ED)

Erectile dysfunction means a man cannot get or keep an erection. Health problems, injury, or side effects of drugs may cause ED. The cause may not be known.

ABOUT VIAGRA

VIAGRA is used to treat ED in men. When you want to have sex, VIAGRA can help you get and keep an erection when you are sexually excited. You cannot get an erection just by taking the pill. Only your doctor can prescribe VIAGRA.

VIAGRA does not cure ED.

VIAGRA does not protect you or your partner from STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) or HIV. You will need to use a condom.

VIAGRA is not a hormone or an aphrodisiac.

WHO IS VIAGRA FOR?

Who should take VIAGRA?

Men who have ED and whose heart is healthy enough for sex.

Who should NOT take VIAGRA?

- If you ever take medicines with nitrates:
 - Medicines that treat chest pain (angina), such as nitroglycerin or isosorbide mononitrate or dinitrate
- If you use some street drugs, such as "poppers" (amyl nitrate or nitrite)
- If you are allergic to anything in the VIAGRA tablet.

BEFORE YOU START VIAGRA

Tell your doctor if you have or ever had:

- Heart attack, abnormal heartbeats, or stroke
- Heart problems, such as heart failure, chest pain, or aortic valve narrowing
- Low or high blood pressure
- Severe vision loss
- An eye condition called retinitis pigmentosa
- Kidney or liver problems
- Blood problems, such as sickle cell anemia or leukemia
- A deformed penis, Peyronie's disease, or an erection that lasted more than 4 hours
- Stomach ulcers or any kind of bleeding problems

Tell your doctor about all your medicines. Include over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal products. Tell your doctor if you take or use:

- Medicines called alpha-blockers to treat high blood pressure or prostate problems. Your blood pressure could suddenly get too low. You could get dizzy or faint. Your doctor may start you on a lower dose of VIAGRA.
- Medicines called protease inhibitors for HIV. Your doctor may prescribe a 25 mg dose. Your doctor may limit VIAGRA to 25 mg in a 48-hour period.
- Other methods to cause erections. These include pills, injections, implants, or pumps.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF VIAGRA

Side effects are mostly mild to moderate. They usually go away after a few hours. Some of these are more likely to happen with higher doses.

The most common side effects are:

- Headache
- Feeling flushed
- Upset stomach

Less common side effects are:

- Trouble telling blue and green apart or seeing a blue tinge on things
- Eyes being more sensitive to light
- Blurred vision

Rarely, a small number of men taking VIAGRA have reported these serious events:

- Having an erection that lasts more than 4 hours. If the erection is not treated right away, long-term loss of potency could occur.
- Sudden decrease or loss of sight in one or both eyes. We do not know if these events are caused by VIAGRA and medicines like it or caused by other factors. They may be caused by conditions like high blood pressure or diabetes. If you have sudden vision changes, stop using VIAGRA and all medicines like it. Call your doctor right away.
- Sudden decrease or loss of hearing. We do not know if these events are caused by VIAGRA and medicines like it or caused by other factors. If you have sudden hearing changes, stop using VIAGRA and all medicines like it. Call your doctor right away.
- Heart attack, stroke, irregular heartbeats, and death. We do not know whether these events are caused by VIAGRA or caused by other factors. Most of these happened in men who already had heart problems.

If you have any of these problems, stop VIAGRA. Call your doctor right away.

HOW TO TAKE VIAGRA

Do:

- Take VIAGRA only the way your doctor tells you. VIAGRA comes in 25 mg, 50 mg, and 100 mg tablets. Your doctor will tell you how much to take.
- If you are over 65 or have serious liver or kidney problems, your doctor may start you at the lowest dose (25 mg).
- Take VIAGRA about 1 hour before you want to have sex. VIAGRA starts to work in about 30 minutes when you are sexually excited. VIAGRA lasts up to 4 hours.

Don't:


- Do not take VIAGRA more than once a day.
- Do not take more VIAGRA than your doctor tells you. If you think you need more VIAGRA, talk with your doctor.
- Do not start or stop any other medicines before checking with your doctor.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

- This is only a summary of important information. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for complete product information OR
- Go to www.viagra.com or call (888) 4-VIAGRA (484-2472).

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SURVEY SAYS ...

➔ Better QB: Colt McCoy or Vince Young? ➔ Better coach: Mack Brown or Darrell Royal?

With another season of great expectations under way in Austin, *Sporting News* surveyed 24 ex-Texas Longhorns for answers to those questions and others.

SN's panel

Bill Acker
DT, 1975, '77-79

Mike Adams
WR, 1992-93, '95-96

Glenn Blackwood
S, 1976-78

Bill Bradley
QB/DB, 1966-68

Blake Brockermeyer
OT, 1992-94

Doug Dawson
G, 1980-83

Russell Erxleben
K/P, 1975-78

Happy Feller
K, 1968-70

Jitter Fields
CB, 1981-83

Lance Gunn
S, 1989-92

Derrick Hatchett
CB, 1977-79

Quentin Jammer
1997-98, 2000-01

Tommy Jeter
DT, 1988-91

Johnnie Johnson
DB, 1976-79

Brian Jones
LB, 1989-90

Nate Jones
WR, 2004-07

Ernie Koy Jr.
RB, 1962-64

Ted Koy
RB, 1967-69

Tommy Nobis
LB/G, 1963-65

Chris Ogbonnaya
RB, 2006-07

Scott Palmer
DT, 1968-70

Adam Schreiber
OL, 1980-83

Robin Sendlein
LB, 1977-80

Joe Shearin
G, 1978-81

Better league: Big 12 or SEC?

➔ SEC	13
➔ Big 12	11

THEY SAID IT

"SEC—and it's not close. You judge a league by its bottom feeders, and (the Big 12's) don't cut it." — **Blake Brockermeyer**

"If you place Texas and Oklahoma in the SEC, I believe they would have a chance to compete for a title. However, I am not certain the same could be said for any other Big 12 school." — **Johnnie Johnson**

"Florida won the national championship last year, but they didn't have to play Texas." — **Chris Ogbonnaya**

"Slight edge to the SEC, but this argument will be put to rest when Texas defeats Florida for the BCS championship." — **Brian Jones**

Better QB: Colt McCoy or Vince Young?

➔ Vince Young	15
➔ Colt McCoy	9

THEY SAID IT

"I have never seen one person take over a game like Vince could." — **Ernie Koy Jr.**

"Vince Young, not even close. National championship. Enough said." — **Mike Adams**

"Vince is the greatest college football player of all time, in my humble opinion. Pure QB? Probably McCoy." — **Joe Shearin**

"I think Vince is one of the 10 best players in the history of college football. Colt has a chance to join him on UT's

Mount Rushmore, depending on how well the team does this year and how well he plays."

— **Lance Gunn**

Who'll make the better pro: McCoy or Oklahoma's Sam Bradford?

➔ Colt McCoy	15
➔ Sam Bradford	9

THEY SAID IT

"McCoy is a Drew Brees clone."

— **Blake Brockermeyer**

"As a 16-year NFL veteran, I'll say Sam because of the height difference."

— **Adam Schreiber**

"Colt's stronger." — **Doug Dawson**

"Sam's a better thrower." — **Bill Bradley**

"Last time I checked, Sam wasn't the most mobile QB in the Big 12. In today's NFL, you better be able to get out of the way."

— **Brian Jones**

Better coach: Mack Brown or Darrell Royal?

➔ Darrell Royal	14
➔ Mack Brown	10

THEY SAID IT

"Who is holier—the Father, Son or Holy Spirit?" — **Robin Sendlein**

"Are you trying to get me excommunicated from the Longhorn family?" — **Brian Jones**

"I will take the legend who has the name on his stadium." — **Derrick Hatchett**

"Slight nod to Coach Brown. Tougher to do what he has accomplished given scholarship limits." — **Lance Gunn**

"I doubt you could put the kids today through the practices we went through with Coach Royal in the fall of 1968 without half of them quitting." — **Scott Palmer**

With a national title in hand, Young (right) comes out ahead of McCoy in our voting.



Campbell is the greatest Longhorn ever because he "put a hurting on many a linebacker."

If a Big 12 South team were to break the Texas-Oklahoma stranglehold, who would it be?

➔ Oklahoma State	13
➔ Texas Tech	5
➔ Texas A&M	3
➔ None of 'em	2
➔ Baylor	1

THEY SAID IT

"Oklahoma State—if they ever hire a real good coach." — **Bill Acker**

"Feels like OSU this year, but I think Texas Tech is the long-term answer." — **Lance Gunn**

"Currently: Oklahoma State. In the future: Baylor. Don't underestimate (coach) Art Briles." — **Ted Koy**

Who's the greatest Longhorn ever?

➔ Earl Campbell	12½
➔ Vince Young	4½
➔ Tommy Nobis	4
➔ Ricky Williams	2
➔ Bevo	1

THEY SAID IT

"That's easy—Earl Campbell."

— **Quentin Jammer**

"I didn't get to play with him at Texas, nor did I get to try and stop him in the NFL. But from afar, I saw Mr. Earl Campbell put a hurting on many a linebacker." — **Tommy Nobis**

"It was unbelievable, the things Tommy Nobis did on the field. I was the punter, and he would be the first player down under the kick. Then he'd play linebacker on defense and when we got the ball back he'd be the pulling guard on offense." — **Ernie Koy Jr.**

— **Jeff D'Alessio**



WILL'S WORLD

Popping this question

A sports fan's gotta ask: Just how married are you to this October wedding date?



Will Leitch is the author of three books, including *God Save The Fan*. He is the founding editor of *Deadspin* and a contributing editor at *New York magazine*. Get more of his opinions at leitch.tumblr.com.

If you ask me, all weddings should be in late February or early August, the two sleepest times of the year on the sports calendar. If your future wife or husband absolutely insists, May or June will work as well because those involve only the NHL and NBA playoffs, and I think those go on all year anyway. But never, never in October.

Unfortunately, a good friend of mine, Jim, did not get the memo. He's having his wedding on Saturday, October 24. I cannot fathom a worse day.

October 24 happens to be the scheduled date of Game 6 of the American League Championship Series and Game 7 of the National League Championship Series—if either is necessary. I spend every night in October locked indoors watching the baseball playoffs. There's really nothing like it, especially when your team is playing, like my Cardinals this year. All your senses are heightened; you spend most of your nonbaseball waking hours zombie-walking



October 17, 2005, fell on a Monday, so it's not likely many Cards fans missed Pujols' shot while attending weddings. But in 2009, will they be so lucky?

around and staring at the clock. Then you pace around and yell at the television for seven hours and get up the next morning to do it again that night. It is not always fun, but it is not a process I like trifled with.

My friend Jim didn't think about this. So now I might spend a large percentage of possibly the single most exciting day on the baseball calendar wearing a suit, explaining my job to strangers I've just met ("Yes, I type about sports ... no, I'm not friends with Derek Jeter ... sorry, I can't get you tickets ...") and feverishly checking scores on my phone. This is unacceptable. Particularly because—and I don't want to get ahead of myself here—it's possible that my Cardinals will be playing in that NLCS Game 7. Albert Pujols could be facing Brad Lidge with the bases loaded ... and I'll be watching someone's aunt dance to "Hollaback Girl." Shiver.

How could he do this? I mean, Jim is a die-hard Red Sox fan. They're in the playoffs too, after all. It's unconscionable. He must answer for himself. For you, *Sporting News* readers, I lambasted him over the phone. This was our conversation:

Jim, what were you thinking? "I wasn't. She said we were doing it that day, and I just nodded dumbly because apparently that's what I'm supposed to do all the time when I get married."

You love the Red Sox. What happens if they're playing that night? "Let's just say I'm not all that concerned. They're not exactly entering the playoffs with a lot of momentum."

Admit it: A part of you is secretly rooting against the Sox so this conflict won't be a conflict. "I wouldn't say I'm rooting against them. I've just been distracted enough with all the wedding planning that I haven't watched 140 of the games this year for the first time in a while, and I haven't wanted to kick anything after a bad loss. I guess it just wouldn't bother me as much if they lost."

You're way too calm about this. "Will, I kind of have other things on my mind. I'm getting married, you know. There are more important things than baseball."

Yeah, well, easy for you to say, buddy. Don't come looking for me when you throw the garter. I'll be in the kitchen with the wait staff, watching the tiny black-and-white TV. For Game 7, sorry Aunt Edna, but I gotta skip "Hollaback Girl."

Bold, daring predictions

1 My friend Jim will be mad at me for this column. Serves him right.

2 By the end of the playoffs, you will vow never, ever to watch another show on TBS. Prepare to hate George Lopez with the burning passion of a thousand suns.



Get used to this face: Until the playoffs are over, you'll be seeing a whole lot of Lopez.

3 Even though the Cubs aren't in the playoffs (yay!), I still can't get the relentlessly catchy "Go Cubs Go" song they play after every win at Wrigley out of my head. What's the best team fan song? You will e-mail me at will@deadspin.com, and I will run the winner next issue. Warning: Whichever song I choose will never, ever leave your brain.

People of the Fortnight

Ken Griffey. Assuming he knows what's good for him, the great Griffey has played his last game in the major leagues. It's difficult to overstate how much Griffey meant for those of us who were teenagers in the '90s. The cool guy with the perfect swing, the huge smile and the backward hat ... it was like having the most popular kid in your school suddenly become an All-Star. He looked older and noticeably tubbier this year, but his last tour of duty with the Mariners reminded us all just how great he was. He'll be The Kid forever.

Tim Tebow. Regardless of whether the NFL wants to admit it, concussions are the most dangerous of football injuries, and the fact the Great Tebow suffered one is proof: I assumed he was indestructible. He needed time off to get his brain straight, lest he suddenly start speaking Latin and becoming friends with Lane Kiffin.



PUJOLS: HARRY CABLOCK / AP; LOPEZ: CHRIS PIZZELLO / AP; TEBOW: ED REINEKE / AP

WHISKEY'S WILD BIG BROTHER.

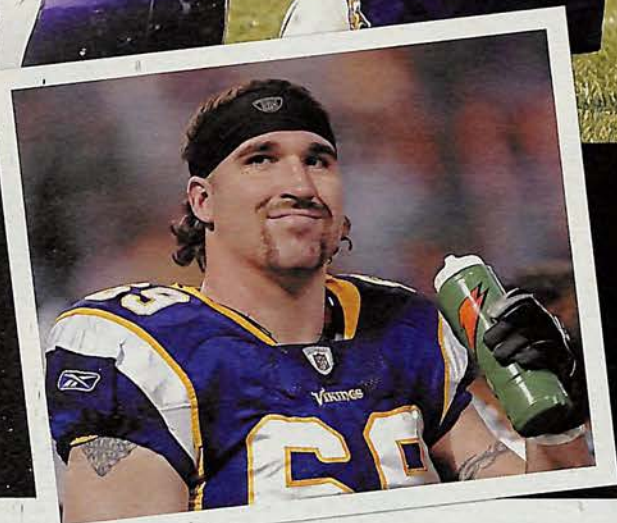


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Q: You seem to have a heck of a wild side, and I'm an adrenaline junkie, too. In the offseason, your teams have looked away while you were running with the bulls, skydiving, etc. What are some of the wildest memories you have from your adventures, and what's left on your bucket list?

Zach Bowie, Scotland, Pa.

ALLEN: Oh, wow. I don't know. Running with the bulls was great, zip-lining through the rain forest was great, and going on safari in Africa, just the whole experience itself was the greatest part of it. I don't know that I consider myself an adrenaline junkie—I just love to explore and try new things and go new places. As far as what's next, I don't really plan them out. I just take them as they come. There's a lot of world out there to explore. I want to do the whole tomato fight thing over in Spain, but I'll have to wait until I retire to do that. I want to go to Ireland, spend some time over there. That and Greece—I want to do that really bad.

Q: Do you think somewhere in Canada, maybe Toronto, would make a good location for an NFL franchise?

Chris Mallory, Greenville, S.C.

ALLEN: Well, baseball pulled it off. I guess you'd have to take a look at the Argonauts up there and see what their attendance record is because that would ultimately be the place they would go. Toronto's a great city. It all depends on, though, if they're trying to take the NFL international and replace the CFL. I think the NFL's doing just fine within the United States, but Toronto is a fun city and it's a logical choice if they're ever going to put a team in Canada.

Q: Are you happier in Minnesota than you were in Kansas City?

Steven Garrett, Kansas City

ALLEN: From an organizational standpoint, absolutely. The Minnesota organization is phenomenal. With (Vikings owner) Zygi Wilf and the coaching staff and the management, it's a great place. And the city of Minneapolis is great. But as far as a community standpoint, I was never unhappy in Kansas City. The community of Kansas City will always be a part of my career, a part of my life. I've still got great friends there and actually just bought a ranch outside there in Kansas. As far as communitywise, I like them both and I'm just as happy, but as far as organizationwise, I'm way happier in Minnesota. People are friendly here, there's a bunch of stuff to do, and there are enough lakes here to provide the world with water, so that works out well. They're very similar in terms of outdoors and such, so that wasn't a hard adjustment.

Q: How does it feel to have a threat like Adrian Peterson on your side?

Tim Brown, Loxahatchee, Fla.

ALLEN: It's awesome. The guy's an absolute beast. I've had to play against him, once back in 2007, and it's way better playing with him. His humility and his drive to be the best set him apart. Every time he touches the ball, you can see he wants to score with it. It's his raw talent, but the guy loves to run the ball and he's been a great team player.

Q: Have the rules established to supposedly protect quarterbacks from injury affected the way you play?

Andy Entrekin, Bedford, Texas

ALLEN: No, no, no. I play as hard as I can on every snap. The rules are there, and obviously we try to play within them, but, no, I won't let it affect the way I play. For the most part, we just play, and if you get a letter in the mail, you get a letter in the mail.

—Ryan Fagan

5 QUESTIONS FOR JARED ALLEN

Jared Allen has survived the running of the bulls in Pamplona, and he has taken down a wild boar with a hunting knife. By comparison, fighting through offensive linemen to get to the quarterback seems like a breeze for Allen, who has 32 sacks since the start of the 2007 season—second only to the Cowboys' DeMarcus Ware. The Vikings defensive end slowed down long enough to answer questions from *Sporting News* readers.

ALLEN (PRACTICE): JIM MONE / AP; ALLEN: JOHN RIEGER / US PRESSWIRE

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REPORT

For the first time since the 1962 Gotham Bowl was played in Yankee Stadium, New York City will host a bowl game—at the new Yankee Stadium. Beginning with the 2010 season, the game will include the third- or fourth-place Big East team and the No. 7 team from the Big 12. The leagues and the Yankees have signed a four-year agreement, and New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg says the game could bring about \$47 million to the city.

This month, MLB Network plans to show more than 50 years' worth of World Series videos, dating back to the first available film from 1943, in an effort believed to be the first coordinated showcasing of Fall Classic productions.

Jesse Palmer, the former New York Giants quarterback turned ESPN college football analyst, has signed a deal with Dr Pepper, one of his first major endorsements.

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So, what's the deal with the UFL?



Dennis Green

The United Football League's inaugural season will feature teams in New York, San Francisco, Orlando and Las Vegas. The first game will be October 8, and the championship game will be played November 27 in Las Vegas. Everything else you need to know:

➤ **Its organizers learned from others' failures.** "If you look back at the prior history of the other leagues, and you get past all of the rhetoric about the relationship with the NFL, there are two recurring patterns that you see," says Bill Mayer, owner of the New York Sentinels. "One is real difficulty in containing costs. Nobody wants to get involved in a business where you think you're going to be writing checks forever to cover the operating costs. The second is having the owners on the same page."

➤ **Games will be affordable for fans.** Ticket prices are about \$20. Games will be shown on Versus and HDNet.

➤ **Some names will be familiar.** Training camp opened September 12—which allowed teams to sign the last cuts of NFL rosters. "The NFL has become such a statistical game—height, weight, 40 time," says commissioner Michael Huyghue, who has worked in several NFL front offices. "Oftentimes they overlook football players." Tight end Jermaine Wiggins (Florida Tuskers) played seven years in the NFL, the last in 2006. He won one Super Bowl and played in another. "I want to go out there and compete and play," he says. "I'm not looking for any miraculous thing to come out of it, as far as getting back to the NFL or anything like that."

➤ **The style of play will look like the NFL's.** "We'll run the same offense that we did very well with at Minnesota, the same offense we did at Arizona," says Dennis Green, coach of the California Redwoods.

➤ **The league wants to complement, not compete with, the NFL.** "The NFL is the big dog," Sentinels quarterback Quinn Gray says. "But the UFL will be right behind them, barking."

— Matt Crossman

‘I wouldn’t have made it working; I LOVED THE GAME’

Sporting News Conversation:

Yogi Berra

Looking back on a life spent on the diamond, this Hall of Fame Yankees catcher wouldn’t change a thing

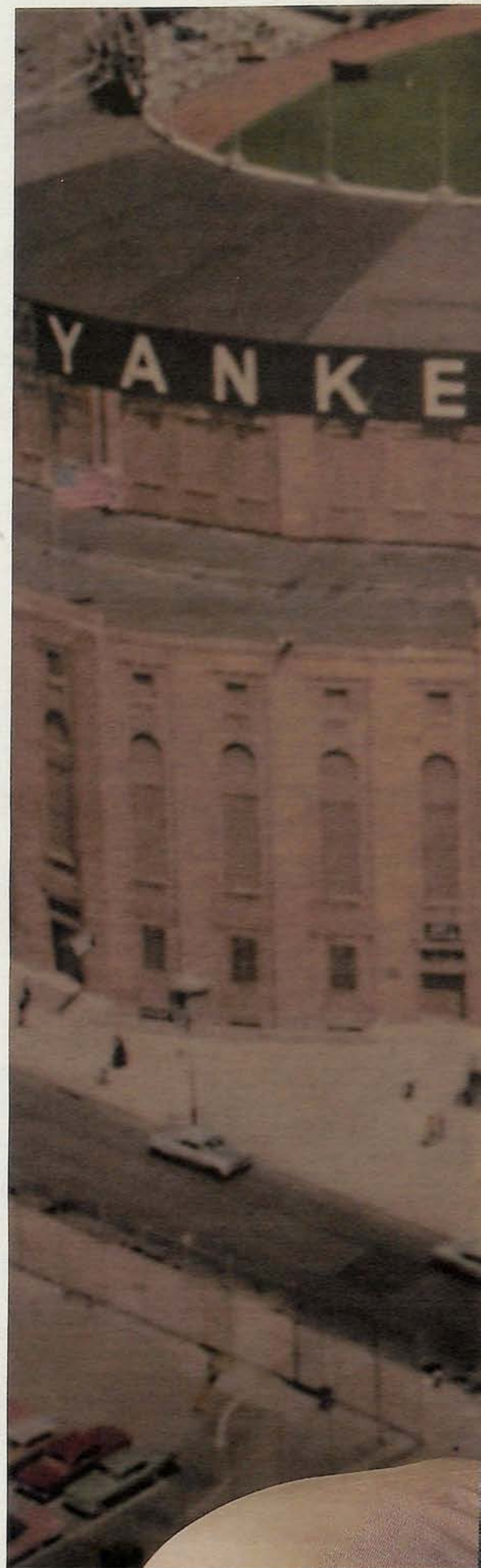
Photo by Bob Leverone / SN

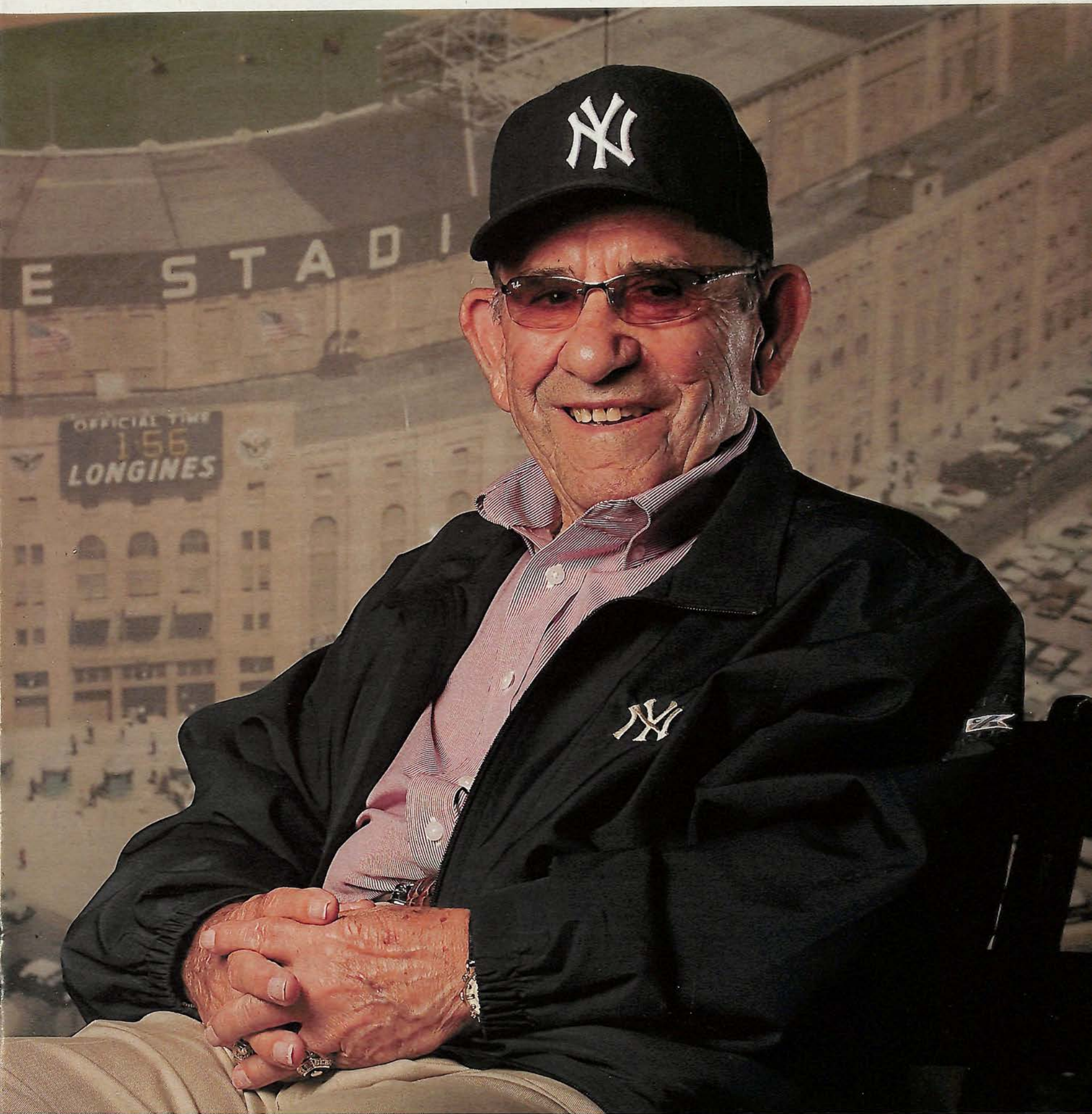
Did he really just say that? Rewind 30 seconds. In a private room adjacent to Yankees manager Joe Girardi’s office, 84-year-old Lawrence Berra is discussing the craft that made him a living legend. That craft happens to be catching, not speaking in malapropisms ... or, to use a more affectionate term, Yogiisms. But here comes a fresh one for the books: “I like small catchers,” Berra says. “They don’t have to work as hard as tall catchers. You just bend down and you’re down there.”

Yogi Berra has long been there for the world’s amusement, and not always on purpose. But had he never spoken a word, he still would have been a superstar, for two reasons: He was one of the greatest catchers

in the history of the game, and he remains its greatest champion—with 10 World Series rings and 14 appearances in the Fall Classic, both records. He went to seven more World Series, winning three, as a manager or coach.

To this day, Berra laughs at his many statements that both puzzled and captivated a nation of sports fans. But he would rather talk baseball. In an hourlong interview with *Sporting News*’ Steve Greenberg, Berra—who manager Casey Stengel once said could fall into a sewer and come up with a gold watch—spoke of growing up fast in St. Louis’ The Hill neighborhood, confounding pitchers with his consummate hitting eye, staying close to the game into old age and marching on in a life he calls “very, very lucky.”





Yogi Berra

SN: What do you think of the new Yankee Stadium? Does it look and feel like home?

BERRA: Outside it does, a little bit. But (inside) there are a lot of changes. ... This is a beautiful stadium. It is. Any place you sit here, you can see the game. Especially with the suites—they're great. They're better than the old ones. But I'm used to playing in the old ballpark, you know? I still miss the old ballpark.

SN: What do you do for the Yankees nowadays? Do you work with the players anymore?

BERRA: I go to spring training. I like to go to spring training and see the guys. I enjoy coming out here to watch the games. They've got a good bunch of kids here, they really do. ... I worked with (Jorge) Posada when I first came back with George (Steinbrenner). I was away for 14 years (before Berra settled a rift with the owner that dated to 1985, when Berra was fired as manager after the 16th game of the season). Now I try to watch batting practice. If I see a guy and think, *Why you bat that way?* I try to straighten him out.

SN: Why do you keep putting on the uniform at spring training?

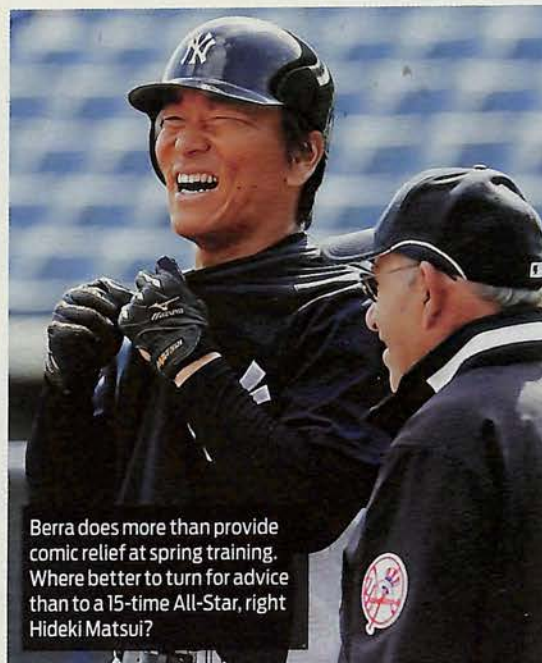
BERRA: Spring training's nice. I just like it. I go on the road trips and everything. I see some of the guys I played against, see coaches I know from way back. I like seeing the guys from Boston. Johnny Pesky, I like to see him. The manager now (Terry Francona), I'm good friends with his dad, Tito. We get along real good.

SN: What means more to you now: that uniform or the next million-dollar commercial?

BERRA: The (Aflac) duck, you're talking about? ... They still use it. It's all right. They still pay. I don't even have to do it.

SN: You are said to be very knowledgeable about today's players and teams. Is that true?

BERRA: Yeah, I watch it. I see what they do. Some I like, some I don't.



Berra does more than provide comic relief at spring training. Where better to turn for advice than to a 15-time All-Star, right Hideki Matsui?

SN: So could you name, for example, the Blue Jays' starting outfield or the Orioles' rotation?

BERRA: Well, I check it every day. Sometimes I get mad about it.

SN: What do you get mad about?

BERRA: All these guys watching (video of opposing pitchers). I know you bat against this guy 15 times—why you got to look at the camera to find out what he's throwing? You don't know what he's throwing by now, there's something wrong with you.

SN: Do you read the Internet?

BERRA: No. Just the papers. And I watch the games on TV when I don't come out here.

SN: What do you like about the game?

BERRA: I think people like to see more home runs. Every park they build now is shorter, like Yankee Stadium. This park right here, I wouldn't mind hitting in it.

SN: Do you like that, more home runs?

BERRA: I take it with a grain of salt. But I'm just saying I'd take my chances here. Because when we played in Washington, the ballpark (Griffith Stadium, home of the Senators) was 405 down the line in left instead of 350. The old ballpark in Cleveland (Municipal Stadium) used to be a long ways until they put the fence in. Things were different.

SN: How would your Yankees teams have fared hitting in this new stadium?

BERRA: We'd have done pretty good. I'm lucky—I played with some good players. Mickey (Mantle), he could have had a field day here. We had three catchers (Berra, Elston Howard and Johnny Blanchard) hit over 20 one year, in '61. We'd have done OK.

SN: Who are the players today who play the game your way—in a manner you and your buddies would approve of?

BERRA: I tell you, this kid they've got at first base here (Mark Teixeira), he's a good fielder—he saves a lot of games with his glove—and he hustles. One thing we got (with the Yankees) is they run. The first thing we do in spring training is make them run out the ball to first base and go across the bag. You watch (Teixeira) play, you see him run down the line. You don't see any of them jogging.

SN: Really? Never?

BERRA: When we first came out (for pregame warmups), we ran around the park—we ran sprints. We did a lot of running. I see some of them today, they jog. I tell them, "Do you jog when you run to first base?" ... We also used to play pepper more. They're not allowed to play pepper anymore, I don't know why. They do long toss now. We didn't play long toss. I always threw to second base—that's how far I threw. I threw where I had to throw. Pepper was fun. We used to play for Cokes. It was good for the reflexes, too.

SN: Albert Pujols plays in your hometown. Do you agree with the conventional wisdom that he's the best player in baseball?

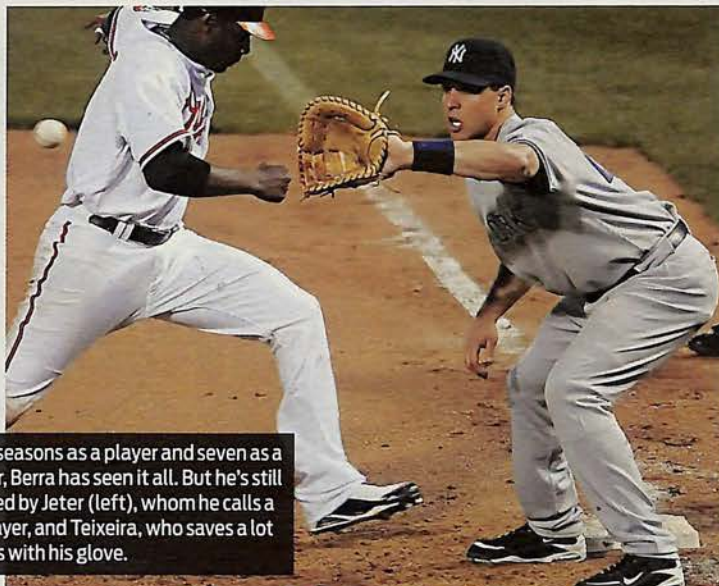
BERRA: Well, he's pretty good. Not bad. What's he got, 40-something home runs now? He's a good defensive player, too. I think the ball's more lively today. I think the fans want to see more home runs. I don't know why, but they do. ... I like (Derek) Jeter. When he got to Lou Gehrig (passing him for most hits as a Yankee), that didn't bother me. There's only one thing he plays for: the ring.

SN: Why aren't there more colorful characters in the game today? Where are the personalities?

BERRA: The thing now is I think the commercials are too long. When Whitey Ford pitched, we didn't have the commercials. He threw three curveballs and a fastball, "Let's go, I'm ready," and we start the inning. What is it now, 3 minutes of commercials? That kills it, and then changing the pitchers so much. The game goes all right 'til the seventh, eighth and ninth, then they keep changing.



After 19 seasons as a player and seven as a manager, Berra has seen it all. But he's still impressed by Jeter (left), whom he calls a team player, and Teixeira, who saves a lot of games with his glove.





Berra (center) is as famous for what came out of his mouth as he is for what he did with the bat, but he's a legit Hall of Famer: 14 pennants, 10 World Series titles, three MVPs.

SN: Old-timers know what you did on the field—15 All-Star selections, three A.L. MVPs, all those World Series. Historians know you were one of the best. Does it ever bother you that so many people know you not as a player but as a comedic figure and a pitcher?

BERRA: I know you're talking about my comments. I got it the first time in St. Louis in 1947. They gave me a day, so I asked (teammate) Bobby Brown, "What can I say to thank the people?" He said, "Just say you're very thankful that you got the gift and all that." I got up and said, "I just want to thank people for making this day necessary." It just comes out. I don't even know I say these things. "It ain't over 'til it's over." It just comes out. "You get to the fork in the road, take it."

SN: What percentage of fans today do you think are aware that you managed a team from each league (the '64 Yankees and the '73 Mets) to the World Series?

BERRA: Around here, they know. Outside of New York, no. I was just lucky. I got fired by the Yankees in '64. George Weiss was the general manager with

the Mets, and he called me. I said, "Did you ask Casey (Stengel, the Mets' manager) if it's all right for me to come over?" Casey said, "Heck yeah," so I went over there (as a coach). Gil Hodges (Stengel's successor as manager and Berra's predecessor) was a nice guy, a great guy.

SN: Do you really cherish those Mets days?

BERRA: I was with them 10 years. Real good. They were very nice people.

SN: Do Mets fans love you, too?

BERRA: Yeah. And I feel that way. I root for them, I really do. Like when I was a kid in St. Louis, I rooted for the Browns and the Cardinals.

SN: You quit school after the eighth grade. If you could go back and finish high school, maybe even go to college, would you?

BERRA: No. I liked baseball too much. I like the way I did it. None of my brothers went to high school. My dad said, "Go to work." My dad came over from the old country by himself and found out when he got off the boat here in New York that there were jobs in St. Louis. He said, "All right, I want to go there." They brought him over there, and he got to work in a brickyard, worked all his life in a brickyard. He didn't know what baseball was. My brothers were good ballplayers. My oldest brother was the best one, but my dad wouldn't let him go play. Tony. They called him Lefty. You ask anybody on The Hill in St. Louis who was the best ballplayer on The Hill, they'll tell you—Tony Berra. We had a lot of ballplayers on The Hill, but their dads wouldn't let them go play. I teased my dad, "Do you realize you could've been a millionaire if you let all your boys play?" He said, "Blame your mother."

SN: What kind of an education did you get instead? Did you learn a lot about life?

BERRA: I had a paper corner. I worked in a factory with my brother. A coal yard. (Hall of Fame Cardinals left fielder) Joe Medwick was my favorite customer. He'd stop by my paper corner—papers were 3 cents then—and give me a nickel and say, "Keep the 2 cents." He was a buddy of mine. Two cents was a lot of money then.

JUST ONE QUESTION



For Bob Feller, Indians Hall of Fame pitcher:

What was it like for the ultimate power pitcher to face Yogi Berra, who so rarely struck out?

"Yogi was a tough out. He had good upper-body strength and swung at every ball that came up there, but I think he, like most lefthanded hitters, was a better low-ball hitter than high-ball hitter. And he was a clutch hitter. You know, Yogi is a very dear friend of mine. We talk about our days in the Navy. I can't say enough good things about him. He doesn't have an enemy in the world. If you don't like Yogi Berra, you don't like yourself."

— Steve Greenberg

JUST ONE QUESTION



For Jorge Posada, Yankees catcher:
What sort of insights has Yogi Berra shared with you over the years?

"He always keeps everything really positive. Having him around at spring training the last 10 years has meant a lot to me. ... He tries to make everything simple, everything a little bit more fun for you. He has talked to me a lot about tough situations and always keeping my focus on what I am trying to do and what the pitcher is trying to do."

— Bill Eichenberger

SN: You had to be one of the smartest hitters ever—there were five different seasons when you had more homers than strikeouts. That's pretty much unheard of.

BERRA: Maybe I copied it from Joe Medwick—he was a bad-ball hitter. See, I could leave a bad ball alone, but then you throw it there again I'll swing at it 'cause I saw it good. They'd tell me I hit a bad ball. I'd say, "I saw it good, so I swung at it. It looked like a strike to me." ... I didn't give 'em a chance to strike me out, I guess. If I could see it, I could hit it. One year (1950) I came up 597 times and only struck out 12 times. I struck out only how many times in the 17 years I played? (Berra had 414 strikeouts in 17 full and two partial seasons.) When I went to the Mets (as a player-coach in 1965) after I'd been retired a year, (Milwaukee Braves pitcher) Tony Cloninger threw three fastballs by me. I swung and missed three times and said, "That's it, I quit. If I can't hit a fastball, hang it up."

SN: There may be a fine line between a) people thinking of you with affection for the famous "Yogiisms" and the fun you poke at yourself and b) people assuming you aren't an intelligent man. Do you consider yourself an intelligent man?

BERRA: Well, I'm not that smart. Maybe in baseball. I am. My wife (Carmen) is the intelligent one. She's a great lady—60 years married, and she helps me out a lot. She reads everything, knows what's going on.

SN: Is there a record of yours that can touch 60 years of marriage?

BERRA: (Shows his wristwatch) My wife gave me this before we got married—18-carat gold, and it's got diamonds on it. I still got it. I put it on every day and I think of her. She's got a lot of pep, my wife. She runs me ragged. We got 11 grandkids, all in New Jersey, all close by. One's getting married on New Year's Eve.

SN: Who's the teammate you miss playing with the most?

BERRA: Mickey was great. (Roger) Maris was great. (Joe) DiMaggio was great. I liked DiMaggio because he'd invite me to dinner with Marilyn Monroe. I had a lot of good teammates. I always said if I didn't make it in baseball, I wouldn't have made it working. I loved the game.

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Yogi Berra



In his long Yankees career, Berra (left) played with a lot of great players—Mantle (center) and Maris among them—and a lot of great friends.

SN: Who's the best friend you ever had in the game?

BERRA: They're all good friends, no kidding. We ate together. Elston Howard, great guy. (Phil) Rizzuto, Mickey, Whitey, Billy Martin. We all hung out together, went to movies together, ate together, drank together. I'd look up to the moon, and if the thing started to blur, I'd say, "Goodbye boys, I'm going." The whole crew was good guys. On the trains, my gosh, we played hearts and poker, had our own car, ate together. And we talked baseball a lot.

SN: How different do you think your life would have been had you been known to the world as Lawrence instead of Yogi?

BERRA: I don't know. My wife even calls me Yogi. Everybody calls me Yogi. I'm Grandpa Yogi. Maybe I'll start signing autographs YB8, like these guys do today. You can't read what they write anyway.

JUST ONE QUESTION



For Whitey Ford, Hall of Fame Yankees pitcher: **Where is Yogi Berra in the pecking order of the greatest Yankees of all time?**

"Well, he was a great player. He and Bill Dickey are probably the two best catchers the Yankees have ever had. But I didn't see Bill Dickey—I saw Yogi. We needed him on our team. He had a great career. Anybody who doesn't know about Yogi isn't a baseball fan."

— Steve Greenberg

You don't know [Yogi Berra] like I know [Yogi Berra]



By **Dale Berra**, 52-year-old former major leaguer (1977-87) and son of the Hall of Fame catcher

Dad was a great athlete on The Hill—could've played soccer at a high level, could've boxed, could've played hockey. He was a great soccer player. When my senior year of high school was coming up, a few scouts told me I was probably going to be a first-round draft pick and shouldn't play football and hockey. Dad said, "Don't listen to 'em. Play 'em all."

I hear Dad tell kids those same words all the time when school groups come to see him (at the Yogi Berra Museum and Learning Center in Little Falls, N.J.). We talk about fair play, sportsmanship, not running with the wrong crowd and playing all sports. Dad worries about kids nowadays burning themselves out on just one sport.

When my brothers (Larry, the eldest, and Tim, who played for the Baltimore Colts in 1974) and I were little, we'd say, "Dad, can we go to the game with you today?" He'd say, "Why you wanna watch for? Go out and play. You ain't gonna learn from watching us." It was rare we were in the clubhouse. He didn't believe in watching.

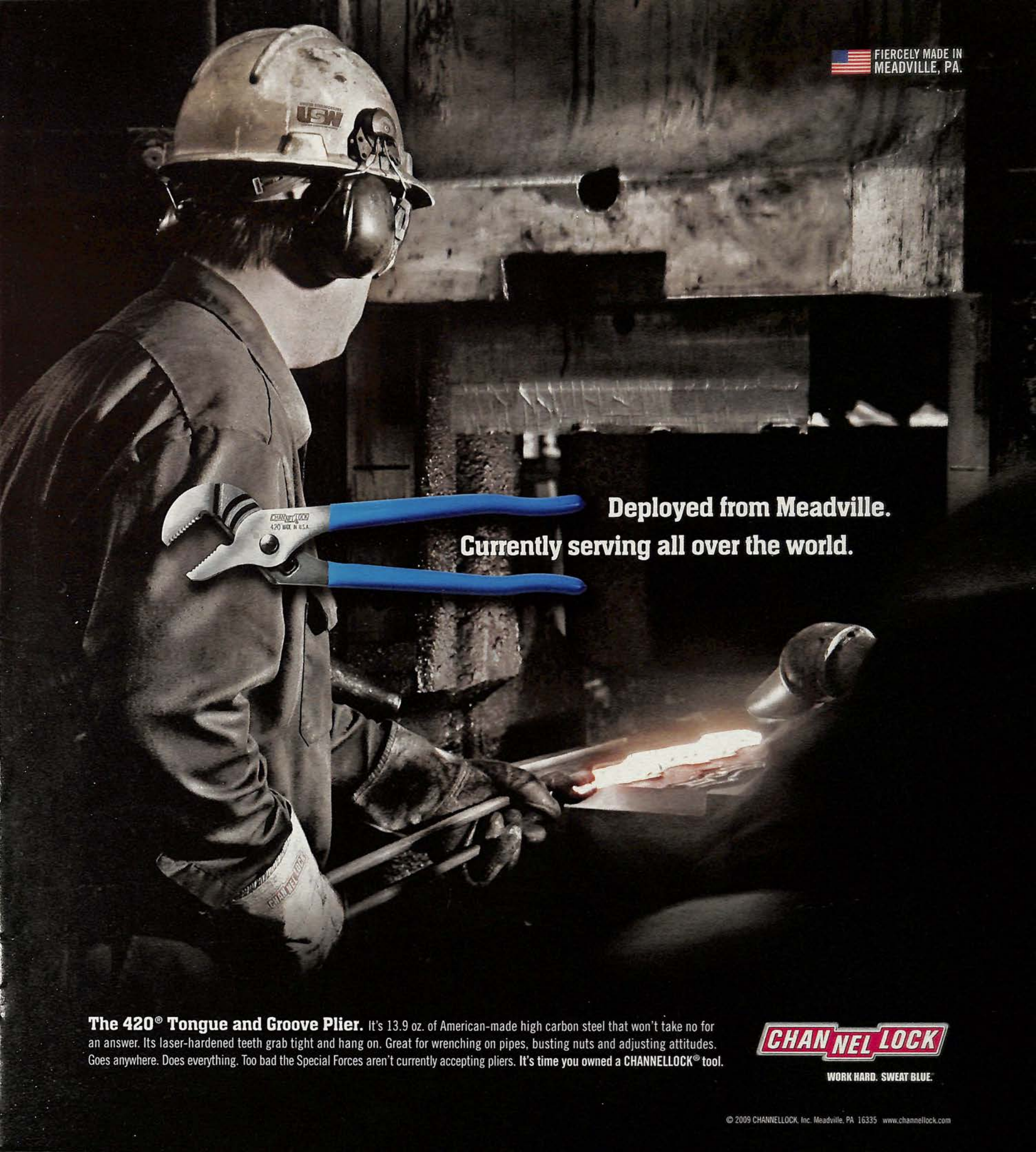
I went to the Yankees in 1985 when Dad was manager and got fired after only 16 games. We didn't last long

there together, but it was very good while it lasted. The players loved him. He was like a father to Don Mattingly, Mike Pagliarulo and Dave Righetti. There was a lot of respect for him in that locker room. We were all very upset when George Steinbrenner let him go.

Dad needs no affirmation ever of how great he was. If our parents took us to a movie and we were waiting in line and the proprietor tried to sneak us in—and this happened often—Dad would say, "No, we'll wait out here with everybody else." And then he'd sign a million autographs. Dad is friends with the guy who makes his coffee in the morning, with the dry cleaner. He could care less if you're a bigwig. And I know he's never considered himself a bigwig. He's the most quoted man in the world who never says anything—a quiet man with high morals and incredible humility.

— As told to Steve Greenberg

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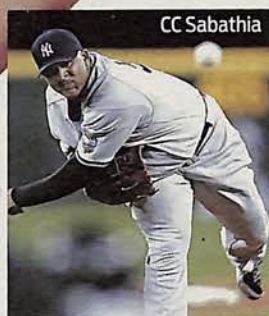
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October Octane

1. HOMER-FIELD ADVANTAGE

When center fielder Torii Hunter is told the Yankees have seven players with at least 20 homers while his Angels have only four, he quickly interjects, "We don't play in their ballpark." Good point. New Yankee Stadium has become baseball's launching pad, partly because of wind conditions that can turn routine flies to right field into cheap homers. The Yankees are built to capitalize on those conditions with a lineup that includes three lefthanded hitters and four switch hitters. Well more than half of their major league-best 242 homers have come at home. "They know how to use this park," Rays reliever J.P. Howell says. "You have that short porch in right field, and you've seen how they poke it out there." October warning: Ousting the Yankees will take at least one victory at Yankee Stadium. They will have home-field advantage throughout the playoffs.



CC Sabathia

2. THE \$341 MILLION NEWCOMERS

Sabathia and Teixeira didn't figure to wilt under the glare of playing on baseball's Broadway. And they haven't. Sabathia started slowly but quickly warmed to his new environment and tied for the A.L. lead in wins while working his standard 220-plus innings. "He's a California guy, laid-back, and just likes to play baseball, and that makes him a perfect fit," TBS analyst Buck Martinez says. Teixeira's transition into pinstripes has gone just as smoothly. He is a leading candidate for his first MVP award because of his power production and Gold Glove-quality defense.

Mark Teixeira

BEST

THE 4 REASONS THE YANKEES WILL MAKE MORE SENSE THAN THE 3 REASONS

By Stan McNeal

When lefthander CC Sabathia signed his seven-year, \$161 million deal last December, *Sporting News* considered making the Yankees our team to beat in 2009.

When first baseman Mark Teixeira came aboard soon after (for eight years, \$180 million), we were sold. The Yankees became

our pick to win the World Series.

When third baseman Alex Rodriguez was exposed for using performance-enhancing drugs, we didn't waffle. When A-Rod faced hip surgery, we didn't waver. Well, only a bit.

When Sabathia won only once in April and Teixeira hit .200, we didn't budge.

When the Red Sox went into the All-Star break leading the second-place Yankees by three games, we stuck with the New Yorkers.

3. MARVELOUS MO

The Phillies, Angels and Cardinals entered October with concerns about their closers. The Yankees can smile because they have Mariano Rivera. He will turn 40 in November but still pitches like he is in his prime. "He hasn't lost a thing," says Brewers closer Trevor Hoffman, No. 1 to Rivera's No. 2 on baseball's career saves list. In 2009, Rivera had the longest consecutive saves streak of his career (36), topped 40 saves for the seventh time and finished with a sub-2.00 ERA for the ninth time. His next blown save in his new park will be his first. And that is just the regular season. Rivera has built his reputation as the game's greatest closer with his postseason performance.



Mariano Rivera

4. ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT

In a clubhouse not known for fun, newcomers A.J. Burnett and Nick Swisher have injected a healthy dose of levity. Burnett began slapping walkoff heroes with shaving cream pies in mid-May, and a tradition was born. Swisher has helped put the media in his corner, literally, by turning tabloid headlines extolling the team into wallpaper for his

locker. The looser atmosphere has helped the Yankees deal with the grind of pleasing the game's largest fan (and media) base. "A lot of guys are being themselves. That's what makes good chemistry happen," Burnett says. "That was the one thing I told myself coming over here. I wasn't going to change. I would stay myself, whether it's the pie in the face or goofing off in here, or getting on people. And I think that has helped."

PINSTRIPE PANEL

A dozen ex-Yankees size up the team's postseason possibilities:

A-ROD'S POSTSEASON BATTING AVERAGE AS A YANKEE IS .245. THINK HE'LL TOP .300 THIS POSTSEASON?

"No way." — **Moose Skowron**

"I think he finally will handle the extra pressure he puts on himself. If he just relaxes, he will be a dominant factor."

— **Mel Stottlemyre**

"Probably not, because he'll be facing premier pitchers in the playoffs. However, he seems to be hitting the hard throwers better. I'm sure he'll be eager to do well. Never underestimate great players." — **Ralph Terry**

OF 7

WIN IT ALL MAKE
THEY WON'T

We aren't about to change our minds now.

Not after the Yankees powered through the second half like a Teixeira blast rocketing through the jet stream at Yankee Stadium. Not after they got huge seasons from dynasty mainstays Derek Jeter and Mariano Rivera and their newest mega-millionaires. And certainly not after they won more games than any team in the majors.

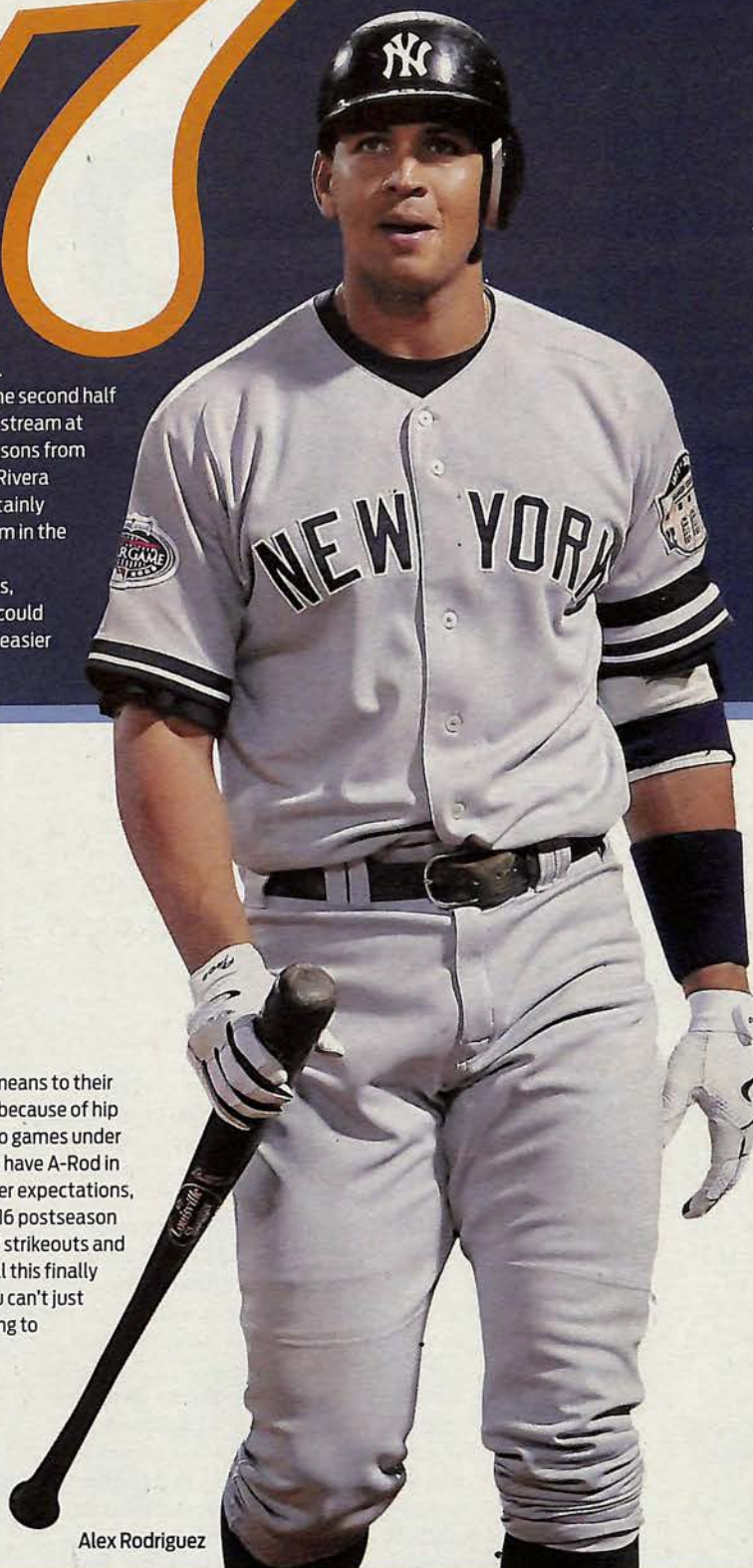
As much as the numbers favor the Yankees, however, coming up with three reasons they could stumble wasn't impossible. But it was much easier finding four reasons they will prove us right.

October Obstacles

1. A-ROD'S STRUGGLES

The Yankees found out how much Rodriguez means to their regular-season lineup when he missed the first month because of hip surgery. When A-Rod debuted May 8, New York was two games under .500. The Yankees already knew what it was like not to have A-Rod in the postseason. Unable to handle the burden of October expectations, he has disappeared since Game 4 of the 2004 ALCS. In 16 postseason games since, Rodriguez is hitting .143 (8-for-56) with 18 strikeouts and one RBI, and the Yankees have won only four times. Will this finally be his year? "I don't know. I hope so," Teixeira says. "You can't just have one or two (hitters) who are clicking if you are going to make it all the way through the World Series."

RODRIGUEZ: CHARLES KRUPA/AP; CHAMBERLAIN: DARREN CALABRESE/AP



Alex Rodriguez

DO YOU HAVE FAITH IN THE BULLPEN?

"Joba (Chamberlain) in the eighth, Mo (Rivera) in the ninth, done deal."

— Roger Clemens

"Joba and the middle relievers still aren't as consistent as I'd like."

— Horace Clarke

"(Phil) Hughes has been awesome, and Mo is still great." — Mike Mussina

THE GUY I WANT UP WITH TWO OUTS IN THE NINTH INNING OF A BIG GAME IS ...

"I'm still very confident with Derek Jeter in those situations. Some things never change."

— Paul O'Neill

"Hideki Matsui—he hits lefties and righties the same." — Bud Daley

"A-Rod. He certainly has the talent but tries too hard (in the postseason) sometimes."

— Stan Williams

THE ONE AREA THAT WORRIES ME ABOUT THESE YANKEES IS ...

"Starting pitchers 3, 4 and 5."

— Bucky Dent

"Lefty success against their lineup. Don't kid yourself: Most of New York's hitters can be pitched to—if you can pitch." — Steve Kline

"If anything, it'd be the bullpen—other than Mariano Rivera." — Dooley Womack

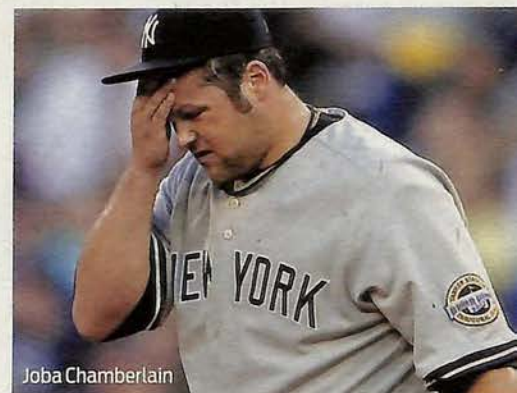
— Jeff D'Alessio

2. ROTATION QUESTIONS

As well as Sabathia pitched in the regular season, he is about to learn how little that matters in New York. His postseason history is more like A-Rod's than Rivera's. The big lefthander's only good playoff start came when he was a rookie eight years ago. He has been rocked for 20 earned runs in 19 innings since. Burnett, a five-year, \$82.5 million offseason addition, also is an unproven postseason investment. He has never pitched in the playoffs, and he went 3-5 with a 4.86 ERA after July 31.

Veteran lefthander Andy Pettitte has proved his postseason mettle but dealt with a tender shoulder in September. And then there is righthander Joba Chamberlain, whose ERA rose by more than a full run (3.58 to 4.75) from late July through the end of the regular season as the team continued to try to define his role. The last time Chamberlain stood on a postseason mound, he was swarmed by bugs and the Indians' offense.

But manager Joe Girardi isn't worried. "CC probably feels stronger this year than maybe he did last year. He carried a very heavy workload (in 2008 with Milwaukee), and we've been able to give him the extra days' rest," Girardi says. "Joba pitched well (against Boston late in the season). Andy had some health concerns that he seemed to get by. A.J. has put a couple of good starts back to back, which makes you feel better."



Joba Chamberlain

3. MISSING MYSTIQUE

The Yankees can't expect their 26 World Series championships to faze any A.L. playoff opponent. One reason: They have lost their past four playoff series. Another: The Tigers, Red Sox and Angels all have eliminated the New Yorkers in their most recent postseason meetings. Detroit sent New York home in 2006, and the Angels ('05) and Red Sox ('04) did the same the previous two years. At least the Yankees handled the Twins in the 2003 and '04 Division Series. And they took five of six from the Tigers in the regular season. They can't say the same about the Angels, their possible ALCS opponent. Los Angeles is the only A.L. team with a winning record against New York this decade. "We've been through a lot already this year," Sabathia says, "so I think we definitely have what it takes to have a good postseason. From top to bottom, we're put together real well."

HERE TO STAY

THE **PHILLIES**, WHO ARE TRYING TO BECOME THE FIRST MAJOR LEAGUE TEAM TO REPEAT AS WORLD SERIES CHAMPIONS SINCE THE YANKEES IN 2000, ARE SET UP FOR A RUN THAT WILL EXTEND WELL BEYOND THESE PLAYOFFS

By Steve Greenberg

What word best describes the Braves' run of 14 consecutive division titles that began in 1991? *Amazing*? *Phenomenal*? Consider *bittersweet*. One World Series title in 14

tries equals a truly historic amount of lost opportunity.

Those Braves lacked power arms, power bats and—come October—the power of intimidation. Beginning in the late 1990s, the Braves—like all of the majors' good teams but especially those in the National League—were completely overshadowed by the Yankees, who had those qualities in spades. It took years of banging their heads against the wall, but the Red Sox eventually crashed through the barrier that separated them from their bitter rivals. Soon, those two powerhouses sat atop the major league food chain.

Some would say that still is the case. But if the Yankees and Red Sox shared an uberdivision with baseball's defending World Series champions, would the Phillies finish third? Hold that thought awhile.

The Phillies have epic thunder in their lineup, which led the N.L. in home runs (224), slugging percentage (.446) and runs scored (5.06 per game) in the regular season. Despite a record-setting closer gone haywire, they had the majors' eighth-best team ERA (4.16)—thanks to a collection of starting pitchers so deep and talented it could almost fill two playoff rotations. The Phillies play defense, they get along, and they have the ominous look and feel of a team that is capable of overwhelming any playoff

opponent. "Are we intimidating? Put it this way: The way we play gets people's attention," manager Charlie Manuel says. "We get after it. We keep coming and coming at you. When we're good and clicking, people are very wary of us and they give us some respect."

Better still, the Phillies' core players—first baseman Ryan Howard, second baseman Chase Utley, shortstop Jimmy Rollins, right fielder Jayson Werth and lefthanders Cliff Lee, Cole Hamels and J.A. Happ—all are in, or entering, the primes of their careers. And all are signed through at least 2010.

"The future's here," says center fielder Shane Victorino. "You've got Cole who's 25, Happ's (26), I'm 28, Ryan's 29, Jimmy's 30, Chase is 30, Jayson is (30). This is a team that won the World Series, lost just one guy (left fielder Pat Burrell), signed guys to multiyear deals and brought in pieces of the puzzle like Raul Ibanez, Cliff Lee, Pedro Martinez. I mean, are you kidding me? Collectively, you look at the big picture and it's like *wow*. I don't see why we can't string together four, five, six years of winning the N.L. East, getting to the playoffs and potentially winning the World Series."

So, take note: Baseball has a Big Three—Yankees, Red Sox, Phillies. Get used to putting those names together. And not necessarily in that order. Of course, some would append that list with the Angels, Cardinals or Dodgers. But no team has more going for it, this fall and beyond, than the Phillies. And there are plenty of reasons why.



PHILLIES CELEBRATE CHARLES KRUPA/AP



Don't be surprised to see this scene again—if not this year, then next.



The Phillies' power is their calling card, and no one plays a bigger role in that than Howard.

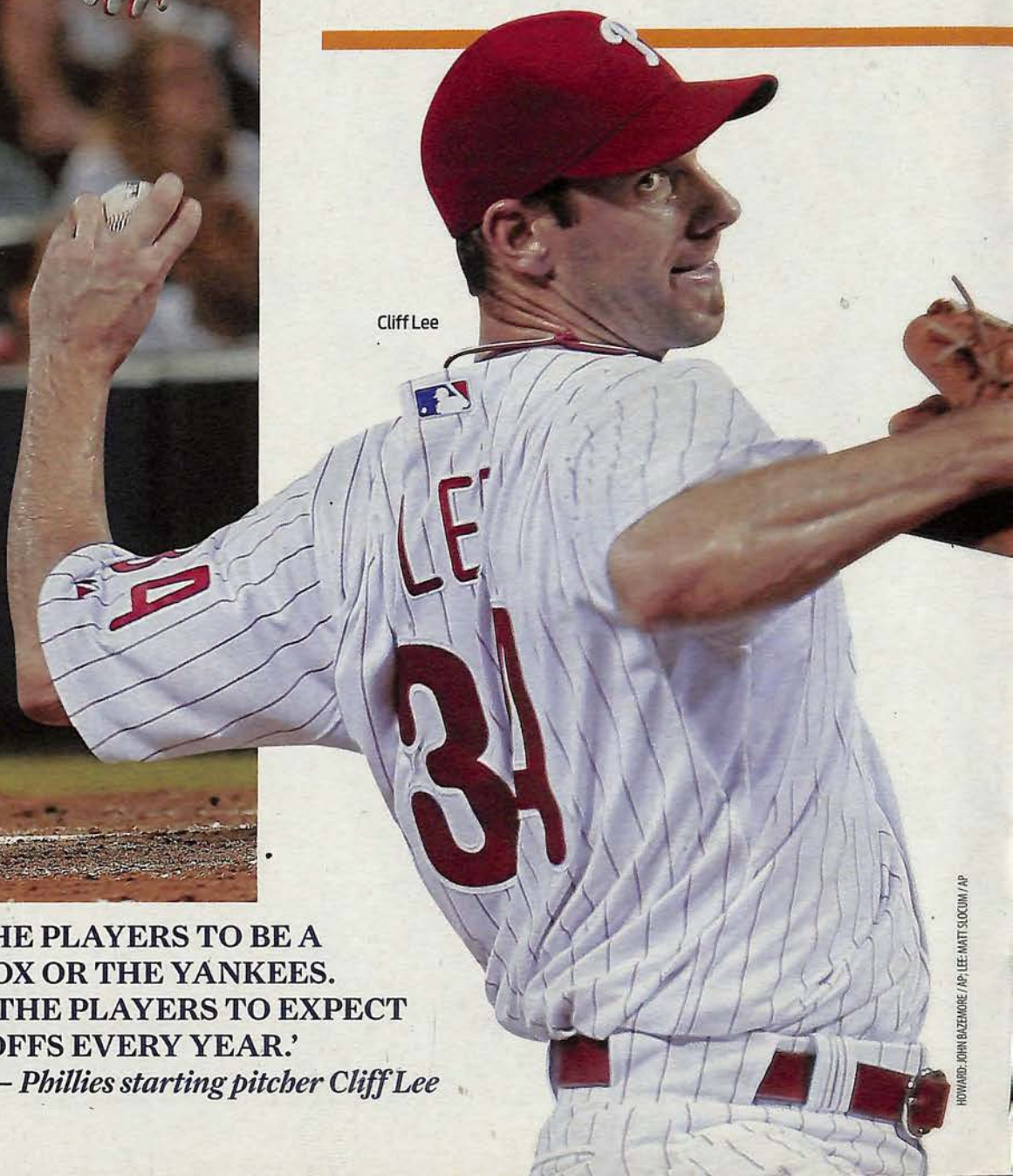
They bash it

As Ibanez ran onto the field to loosen up before an early-September game in Philadelphia, first base coach Davey Lopes looked at hitting coach Milt Thompson and shook his head. "Is he ever going to get a hit again?" Lopes asked. "How can someone as hot as he was get this cold?" Within a week, Ibanez was driving the ball again, and on September 8 both he and Utley hit their 30th home runs to make the Phillies the 12th team in major league

history with four 30-homer hitters. They joined Howard, who reached 200 career home runs faster than any player in major league history, and the ever-improving Werth.

"They bang it out every night," Marlins outfielder Cody Ross says. "They are liable to score 15 runs a night. That's how good their offense is."

The Phillies scored a higher percentage of runs via the long ball than any team in the majors this season, which doesn't thrill



Cliff Lee

'I THINK WE'VE GOT THE PLAYERS TO BE A TEAM LIKE THE RED SOX OR THE YANKEES. WE HAVE THE TEAM AND THE PLAYERS TO EXPECT TO BE IN THE PLAYOFFS EVERY YEAR.'

— Phillies starting pitcher Cliff Lee

HOWARD: JOHN BAZEMORE / AP; LEE: MATT SLOCUM / AP

Manuel. He would like to see more situational hitting from his players. But the Phillies have displayed a knack for hitting home runs when they have needed them, as they did when they hit nine in last October's five-game World Series victory over the Rays.

"When you're least expecting it, all of the sudden one of our guys will jump up and bite you with a home run or a big hit," says one of the architects of this team, Pat Gillick, who passed the general manager baton to Ruben Amaro Jr. in the offseason. Though they play in hitter-friendly Citizens Bank Park,

the Phillies hit more of their homers on the road in 2009. Not coincidentally, they tied for the major league lead with a 48-33 road record. As Manuel says, "Champions can play anywhere."

They can go deep, but the Phillies don't apply offensive pressure with power alone; they also do it with often-overlooked speed. The top three hitters in the lineup—Rollins, Victorino and Utley—finished among the N.L.'s leading basestealers and combined for more steals (79) than seven N.L. teams, including the Cardinals. As a team, Philadelphia led the majors in stolen base success rate (81.0 percent).

They bring it

Lee, acquired from the Indians in late July, knew he was joining a terrific team. "But after getting here and seeing them, playing with them," he says, "it's probably more impressive than what I was expecting." He is referring to the pitching staff, not the lineup.

Consider the options Manuel had to work with as he pondered his playoff rotation:

- Lee, the reigning A.L. Cy Young award winner.
- Hamels, the 2008 NLCS and World Series MVP, who lowered his ERA by nearly half a run in his final eight starts this season.
- Joe Blanton, a righthander who went 10-6 with a 3.21 ERA from the start of July through the end of the regular season.
- Martinez, the rejuvenated potential Hall of Famer. At 37, he went 5-1 with a 3.63 ERA after making his Phillies debut in mid-August.
- Happ, an N.L. rookie of the year candidate who led all Phillies starters with a 2.93 ERA.

That doesn't include longtime major league starters Brett Myers and Chan Ho Park, who settled into bullpen roles. "It's going to be tough if they run into the (Adam) Wainwrights, (Chris) Carpenters and (Chad) Billingsleys. When you run into those kind of pitchers, your pitching staff really has to be there," Marlins catcher John Baker says. "But I think the Phillies have it."

Over time, the trade for Lee could prove as significant for what the Phillies didn't give up as for what they got. The Indians wanted Happ, but Amaro wouldn't part with the young lefthander who Lee says "is only going to get better—and he's an excellent pitcher right now." It was an executive of the year type of decision. Amaro also stood firm on keeping top minor league prospect Kyle Drabek, reportedly costing Philadelphia a shot at Blue Jays ace Roy Halladay before the club turned its attention to Lee. Manuel calls Drabek "a bona fide big leaguer. I really like how he throws."

So many quality options, so little room in the rotation. What a great problem to have.

THE PHILLIES' ACHILLES' HEEL

Recent World Series have been similar. Mostly one-sided. Usually played in cold, miserable weather. Always the same ending: a closer dropping to his knees, raising his arms and being mobbed by teammates. Last year, Brad Lidge struck out Tampa Bay's Eric Hinske on a raw, wet night at Citizens Bank Park to clinch the Phillies' five-game victory. In previous years, the Red Sox's Jonathan Papelbon, Cardinals' Adam Wainwright, White Sox's Bobby Jenks and Red Sox's Keith Foulke had the honors. Not since Marlins starter Josh Beckett shut out the Yankees in 2003 has someone other than a closer been on the mound for the final out of the postseason.

No wonder fans from Philadelphia to Anaheim—with St. Louis in between—are fretting over their team's finisher. "It's a tough job," Cardinals manager Tony La Russa says. "Just check the papers every day." The newspapers haven't been kind to Lidge lately. A year after he went 48-for-48 in save chances, he has become the Phillies' biggest question mark. After he blew his major league-high 11th save chance, Phillies manager Charlie Manuel finally gave up and said the club would have to find other ways to close games.

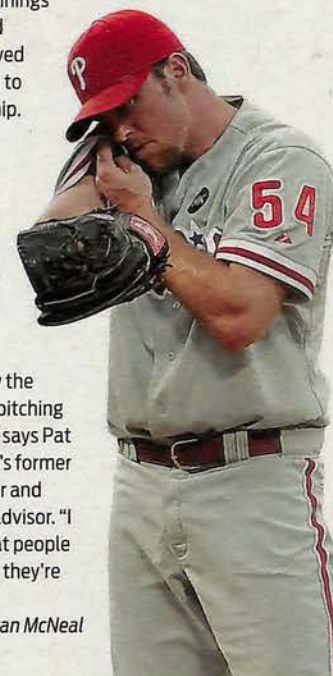
Translation: Philadelphia would go with the dreaded closer-by-committee approach, a ninth-inning strategy that causes managers to double up on the Turns. "No question," Cubs manager Lou Piniella says, "when everybody is slotted into their roles, the situation is better for everyone." Righthander Ryan Madson likely will be Manuel's first choice, but when he works the ninth, someone else has to slip into his eighth-inning role. Manuel says he will call

on the best options available, even if that means summoning a starting pitcher such as rookie J.A. Happ.

Manuel's challenge is compounded because the Phillies have worked much of the season with a bullpen depleted by injuries. Among the mainstays, only Madson has avoided a trip to the disabled list. As a result, a year after the Phillies posted the best bullpen ERA in the N.L., they plummeted to ninth. Of course, Lidge's 7.21 ERA was the main reason behind the drop. His best ERA for any month was 5.91 (July), and his ERA for the season was more than three and a half runs higher than his career ERA. Reasons given for Lidge's difficulties have ranged from a sprained right knee, tipping pitches, command issues with his fastball and a lack of snap on his normally hard-biting slider.

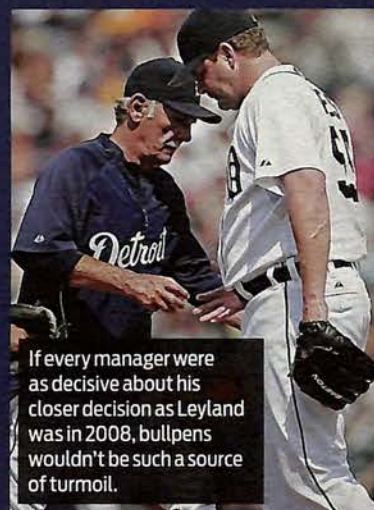
The Phillies did not lose a game they led after eight innings last season, and the bullpen proved huge in their run to the championship. They enter this postseason with only one certainty about their bullpen: It holds the key to their chances of repeating. "Our whole situation depends on how the back end of our pitching staff performs," says Pat Gillick, the team's former general manager and current special advisor. "I know that's what people are saying. Well, they're right."

—Stan McNeal



How to handle a struggling closer

By **TODD JONES**, whom Tigers manager Jim Leyland removed from the closer role in July 2008



If every manager were as decisive about his closer decision as Leyland was in 2008, bullpens wouldn't be such a source of turmoil.

The first thing a manager will do is ask a closer—in a nonjudgmental way—if he is healthy. This is a closer's out, a way of being protected from media criticism. If you aren't hurt and continue to struggle, the manager will call you in his office again. This time, he will do the talking. When I lost my ninth-inning job for the last time, the manager didn't waver. I was out, and he didn't use me in another save situation. The mistake managers often make is that they aren't that decisive. When closers go bad, their teams usually don't recover. Before the playoffs begin, you had better have your guys in place. Whoever is your closer, you stick with him. Lock the doors and hold on.

They have the little big things

LEADERSHIP. Back in 2006, the Phillies were led by David Bell and Bobby Abreu. Both players were jettisoned before the 2007 season, opening the door for the “Young Turks,” as Gillick still calls them, to “kind of take over and say, ‘This is the way things are happening.’” And so the team fell in step with Utley, Rollins, Howard and Burrell.

The Yankees have Derek Jeter. The Red Sox have Jason Varitek. The Phillies have, above all others in terms of leadership, Utley and Rollins. “Quasi-coaches,” Gillick says. “They police the clubhouse and take care of situations the manager can’t take care of.” According to both Gillick and Manuel, roughly half the team mirrors each player: the stoic, old school players reflecting Utley, the game’s premier second baseman; the loose, fun-loving types reflecting shortstop Rollins, a former N.L. MVP. In between lies zero friction whatsoever.

“This has been, without a doubt, the best character team that I ever had,” Manuel says. “And it started three years ago. These guys are very strong individuals. And with the talent that they carry, it’s going to be hard for us not to be there on a yearly basis.”

CONFIDENCE. “We know when we go out on the field what we’re going to do,” Victorino says, “and that’s win a ballgame.” That sentiment echoed the rallying cry of a team that slogged to a 39-37 start before finally reclaiming its championship swagger.

In an early-September series, the red-hot Giants held the Phillies to three runs in three nights—and still lost two of the three games. Before the series finale against Giants ace Tim Lincecum, Manuel said, “We talk about winning every game. We’ve got to go get Lincecum.” A go-ahead double by Howard backed up Martinez in a 2-1 victory. “I think we know we can beat anybody,” Howard says.

INTIMIDATION. In August 2008, the Phillies were swept by the Dodgers in four tight games in Los Angeles. A week later in Philly, the Dodgers were obliterated in four games by a combined score of 27-5. That September, the Brewers visited Citizens Bank Park and were crushed by a 26-10 count in a four-game sweep. Then came the postseason, when the Phillies thoroughly outperformed both clubs. “I’m not sure they thought they could beat us,” Manuel says. At the winter meetings last offseason, a rival G.M. told Manuel

the Phillies had more heart than his team did. “I didn’t make a comment either way,” Manuel says, “but that made me feel good.”

Entering this year’s playoffs, G.M. Ned Colletti hoped his Dodgers might rise to the challenge presented by the team that dominated the 2008 NLCS, winning in five games. “What did we learn about playing at that level?” Colletti says. “What did we learn from such a tough-minded club like Philly?” Mets third baseman David Wright, whose team notoriously finished behind the rival Phillies in down-to-the-wire races in 2007 and 2008, believes it boils down to “mental toughness.” Says Wright, “They obviously have the ability to grind it out and dig down deep and empty the tank in September.” Such praise isn’t wasted on the also-rans of the world.



With the fun-loving Rollins and the stoic Utley running the team, every Phillie—no matter his personality—has someone to look to for leadership.

They haven’t peaked

Wright’s description of the Phillies fails to do them justice. Even after winning the World Series, their tank was full. “It’s like they didn’t know it was over,” Manuel says. “Someone had to say, ‘Come on, guys, you won. You can go home

now.’ I know those guys. They had more left. That tells me they’ll be ready if they get another shot at it.”

The Phillies aren’t picky, but they would love to get a crack at the Yankees or Red Sox later this month. “Oh, yeah,” Victorino says. “Most

definitely.”

“I know our players like the competition part of it,” Manuel says. “The better the opponent, it seems the better they like to play.”

So, yes, call it a Big Three. Any doubters still out there?

THE SECRET TO THE PHILLIES’ LONG-TERM SUCCESS: AN INSIDER’S VIEW

As a general manager, **Pat Gillick** built winners in Toronto, Baltimore, Seattle and Philadelphia. The 72-year-old—now in an advisory role with the defending champs—talked to *Sporting News* about why the Phillies could keep the rest of the N.L. East in a headlock for years to come.

We’ve got good ownership. Our ownership is like Warren Buffett—they’re investors. They hire professional management to manage the team. They’re not going to interfere. Sometimes, whether it’s because of ego or a desire to be seen, baseball owners have got to stick their nose into things. Our owners love the Phillies and go to the games, but as far as management, they leave it up to (team president and CEO) David Montgomery and (G.M.) Ruben Amaro.

Our manager never has a bad day.

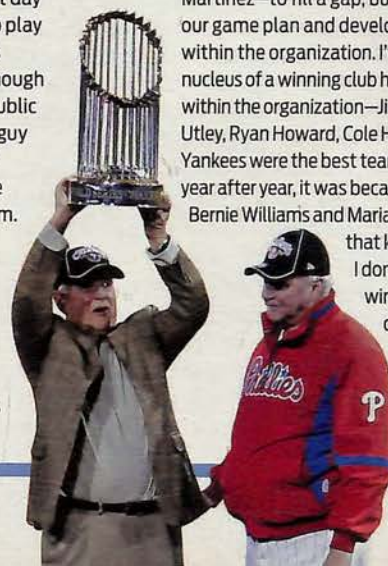
If we lose a tough one, Charlie (Manuel) comes to the park the next day and he’s fine; he’s ready to play baseball. That’s one of his biggest strengths. Even though Charlie comes off to the public sometimes as this simple guy from West Virginia, those players see him for who he really is. They believe in him. They know he’s loyal to them, and they’re loyal to him.

We are a very consistent organization. We won’t do things, in my judgment, that stray too much

from the game plan. We might go out and get a free agent—a Raul Ibanez or Pedro Martinez—to fill a gap, but we try to stay on our game plan and develop the players from within the organization. I’ve always felt the nucleus of a winning club has to come from within the organization—Jimmy Rollins, Chase Utley, Ryan Howard, Cole Hamels. When the Yankees were the best team in the league year after year, it was because Derek Jeter, Bernie Williams and Mariano Rivera were

that kind of a nucleus. I don’t think you can win over a long period of time with a collection of free agents.

—As told to Steve Greenberg



ROLLINS AND UTLEY: LARRY GRIELZI / AP; GILICK AND MANUEL: JULIE JACOBSON / AP

By Stan McNeal

You know about the MVP (Albert Pujols), the Cy Young candidates (Chris Carpenter and Adam Wainwright) and the big deadline acquisition (Matt Holliday). But for the Cardinals, getting back to the playoffs for the first time since winning the 2006 World Series has involved more than their superstars. Four players who left spring training with uncertain roles have stepped up.

A TEAM OF STARS, BIG AND SMALL

SURE, THE **CARDINALS'** MARQUEE NAMES WILL BE INSTRUMENTAL IN ANY PLAYOFF RUN THEY MAKE, BUT THE TEAM WOULDN'T BE ANYWHERE WITHOUT ITS ROLE PLAYERS



BRENDAN RYAN
SHORTSTOP

Before this season, Ryan didn't always take his job seriously enough to please manager Tony La Russa. That has changed, and, not coincidentally, so has his manager's opinion of him. After beginning the season as a backup to Khalil Greene, Ryan enters the playoffs as the starting shortstop and, according to his manager, "one of our core guys."

🔴 **Ryan on his breakout season:**

"Going into spring training, my goals were to become the guy at second who played against lefties and establish myself as the backup shortstop. ... I wanted to make it clear that this job is important to me and this is where I want to be for a long time.

"My season changed when we were in Atlanta (in late April) and I got to start all three games. Every game I had all kinds of chances.

... Fortunately, I made all the plays. They started looking at me differently after that. My thing is to make every play I'm supposed to make and then if I can rob some hits, let's do it. ... To hear my manager talking about me and a Gold Glove is ridiculous."



SKIP SCHUMAKER
SECOND BASE

Marlins manager Fredi Gonzalez remembers that Schumaker, a career outfielder, looked "like a duck out of water, as he should have" at second base in spring training. When the Marlins played St. Louis in mid-September, Gonzalez hardly recognized Schumaker.

"You don't even say this guy is an outfielder anymore," Gonzalez said. "Unbelievable improvement."

🔴 **Schumaker on the switch:** "The week before I went to spring training, I got the call from Tony. He told me to bring an infield glove with me because he was thinking about trying me at second. My heart stopped a little bit because this was completely from left field. This wasn't October—this was January 25. But I said, 'I'll try it. Absolutely.'"

"There have been a lot of sleepless nights, especially in the spring. Turning the double play was really tough. Fortunately, Tony gave me a long leash because it was a difficult spring. I still work every day trying to fine-tune something. I hope I stay at second from now on, but wherever Tony wants me to go, I'll go."



RYAN FRANKLIN
CLOSER

The ridiculous red growth sprouting from Franklin's chin is "kind of superstition, part for looks and maybe slightly for intimidation." Franklin needs an imposing look because he lacks the chest-thumping testosterone and 99-mph fastball of many closers. It must be working—Franklin left spring training as a setup man but quickly assumed the closer job and pitched his way onto his first All-Star team.

🔴 **Franklin on the transition from setting up to closing:** "It doesn't matter if I'm pitching in the first, seventh or ninth. As long as I'm on the mound and there's a hitter up there trying to knock my head off, I'm ready. I enjoy the chess match between pitching and hitting. I like going to the ballpark every day and trying to learn something.

"I know I'm not the wild, crazy closer type. I get fired up, but I think better when I'm calm. ... My dad used to tell me, 'Son, you can be really good.' I was OK with being just good and not being an All-Star. Nothing super, just good. Maybe I'll try to be great from now on."

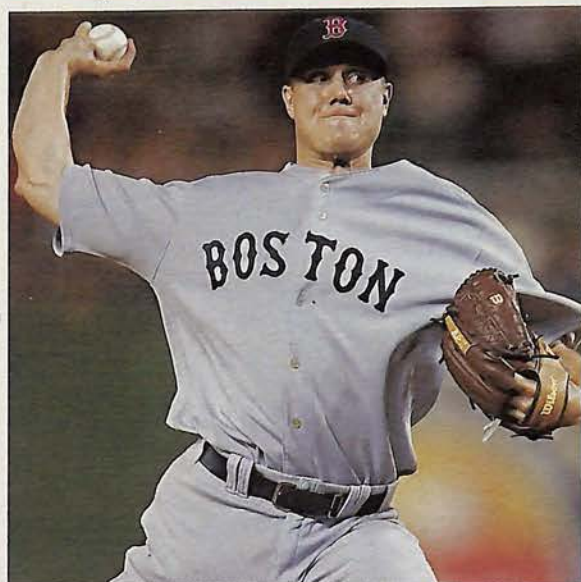


JOEL PINEIRO
NO. 3 STARTER

After Pineiro failed in his attempt to close for Boston, he was traded to St. Louis midway through the 2007 season and inserted into the rotation. He was mediocre, at best, for the next year and a half. After finally taking pitching coach Dave Duncan's advice this season, Pineiro has turned the Cardinals' dynamic 1-2 pitching punch into a 1-2-3.

🔴 **Pineiro on his success:** "Relying on the sinkerball has been the biggest change. Duncan talked and talked to me, getting me to trust in it. It's worked. After I said earlier this season that I wished I had done this before, our bullpen coach, Marty Mason, told me he was going to cut out that quote and show it to younger pitchers in spring training.

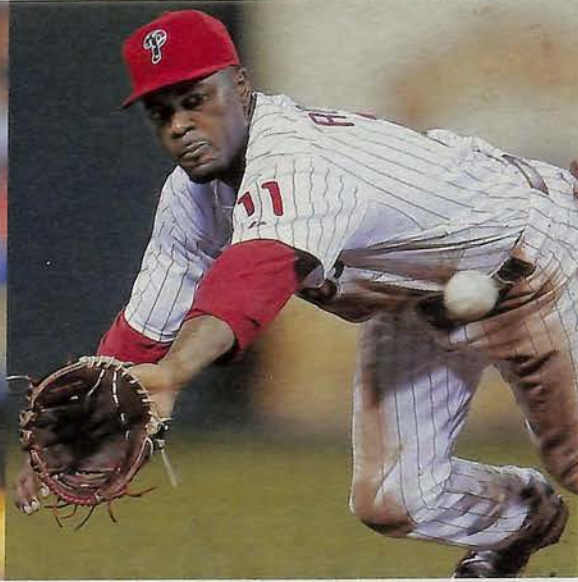
"Being healthy has been key, too, after having shoulder and groin problems the past couple of years. It's just been a matter of gaining back that feeling of going out every five days and having the team trust me. The sinkerball is something I plan on sticking with."



Papelbon gets all the credit in Boston, but the bullpen in front of him does its job almost as well.



Thome, a member of the 500-homer club, gives the Dodgers a powerful bat off the bench.



Not too many ground balls get past shortstop Jimmy Rollins and the middle of the Phillies' defense.

Strong arms ... and bats and gloves

No team is perfect, but every playoff club—well, almost every club—is dominant in some key aspect of the game

1-2 ROTATION PUNCH

1 **CARDINALS** (Chris Carpenter, Adam Wainwright). They were a combined 23-4 with a 2.02 ERA after July 1, and both were dominant during St. Louis' run to the 2006 championship.

2 **Red Sox** (Jon Lester, Josh Beckett)

3 **Phillies** (Cole Hamels, Cliff Lee)

At the bottom: Dodgers (Chad Billingsley, Randy Wolf). Billingsley struggled in the second half, and Wolf is making his postseason debut.

LATE-INNING RELIEF

1 **RED SOX**. Closer Jonathan Papelbon is just one of the power arms in Boston's deep, veteran bullpen.

2 **Yankees**

3 **Dodgers**

At the bottom: Phillies. Fallen closer Brad Lidge has been especially awful this season (0-8, 7.21 ERA, 11 blown saves), and an unsettled bullpen is a scary postseason proposition.

HEART OF THE ORDER

1 **PHILLIES** (2B Chase Utley, 1B Ryan Howard, RF Jayson Werth). And that's not even counting LF Raul Ibanez, the fourth member of the Phillies' 30-homer club.

2 **Yankees** (1B Mark Teixeira, 3B Alex Rodriguez, DH Hideki Matsui)

3 **Cardinals** (1B Albert Pujols, LF Matt Holliday, RF Ryan Ludwick)

At the bottom: Tigers (RF Magglio Ordonez, 1B Miguel Cabrera, DH Aubrey Huff/Marcus Thames). Aside from Cabrera, who is one of the best hitters in the game, there are questions throughout Detroit's lineup.

DEFENSE

1 **PHILLIES**. The up-the-middle glove work of SS Jimmy Rollins, 2B Chase Utley and CF Shane Victorino is unmatched.

2 **Angels**

3 **Twins**

At the bottom: Tigers. With achy legs in left field (Carlos Guillen) and right field (Magglio Ordonez), Detroit can't cover much ground in the outfield.

SUPPORTING CAST

1 **DODGERS**. There was no trading deadline splash, but late additions RP George Sherrill, 2B Ronnie Belliard, 1B Jim Thome, SP Vicente Padilla and SP Jon Garland join OF Juan Pierre to boost the team's depth.

2 **Phillies**

3 **Rockies**

At the bottom: Twins.

The season-ending injuries to 1B Justin Morneau and 3B Joe Crede really tapped into the team's depth.

TEAM MAKEUP

1 **ANGELS**. This is an easy nod, considering everything they overcame to clinch their sixth playoff berth in the past eight seasons.

2 **Rockies**

3 **Yankees**

At the bottom: Dodgers.

Things are much better since the arrival of manager Joe Torre, but the Dodgers aren't there yet.

ROAD TEAM

1 **PHILLIES**. Philadelphia finished 15 games over .500 on the road and outscored opponents by 70 runs away from Citizens Bank Park.

2 **Yankees**

3 **Angels**

At the bottom: Tigers.

Detroit finished 11 games under .500 on the road and was outscored by 54 runs away from Comerica Park.

STRATEGIST

1 **CARDINALS** (Tony La Russa). Nobody dissects X's and O's and examines the minutiae of the game better than St. Louis' skipper.

2 **Angels** (Mike Scioscia)

3 **Red Sox** (Terry Francona)

At the bottom: Yankees.

Joe Girardi is the only one of the group without postseason managerial experience.

TEAM SPEED

1 **ANGELS**. 3B Chone Figgins (42 stolen bases) and RF Bobby Abreu (29) are the primary basestealers, and there is speed throughout the lineup and on the bench.

2 **Phillies**

3 **Dodgers**

At the bottom: Tigers.

CF Curtis Granderson is Detroit's only basestealing threat, and no playoff team stole fewer bases than the Tigers.

LEADOFF MAN

1 **YANKEES** (Derek Jeter). The catalyst for the best offense in baseball, Jeter had a .431 OBP and hit .384 when leading off an inning.

2 **Angels** (Chone Figgins)

3 **Red Sox** (Jacoby Ellsbury)

At the bottom: Phillies

(Jimmy Rollins). He is capable of greatness, but his on-base percentage this season (.296) was anemic and he led the majors in outs made.

BIGGEST THREAT TO THE YANKEES

1 **RED SOX**. The Angels have had more success against the Yankees this season/decade, but Los Angeles would have to get past the Red Sox first.

2 **Angels**

3 **Phillies**

And smallest: Rockies.

Their chances of even making it to the World Series are slim.

— Ryan Fagan



Figgins gives the Angels the speed they need on the basepaths.

Scouts' Views: Veteran leadership

TWO SCOUTS—ONE FROM EACH LEAGUE—ANALYZE EIGHT PROVEN OCTOBER PERFORMERS AND DISCUSS WHAT WE SHOULD EXPECT FROM EACH THIS POSTSEASON



Jason Varitek



Mike Lowell

Which Red Sox veteran needs to be in the lineup more often:
C Jason Varitek or 3B Mike Lowell?

A.L. scout: "It's all about the Yankees for Boston. To have any chance of beating the Yankees in the ALCS, they're going to need Lowell's righthanded bat against those lefthanders, (CC) Sabathia and (Andy) Pettitte."

N.L. scout: "Varitek slows the game down to a crawl when he's calling pitches, but he still knows how to get the most out of that staff. As thin as their pitching is, they're going to need all the help they can get."



PEDRO MARTINEZ



JOHN SMOLTZ

Which future Hall of Famer has more to offer his team: Phillies RHP Pedro Martinez or Cardinals RHP John Smoltz?

A.L. scout: "(St. Louis') Dave Duncan has to be the greatest pitching coach ever. Smoltz was terrible with Boston, but Duncan got him throwing the slider again, and he looks pretty good. He's tough at this time of the year."

N.L. scout: "With the way (Cole) Hamels has been, Pedro might be Philadelphia's third starter behind (Cliff) Lee and (Joe) Blanton. That 130-pitch game (on September 13) may have taken a lot out of Pedro, though."



JUAN PIERRE



JIM THOME

Which Dodgers veteran will provide the bigger boost off the bench: OF Juan Pierre or 1B Jim Thome?

A.L. scout: "Thome, because he can get you three runs with one swing. Pierre can run, but for me he's not one of those guys who can steal a base when everybody in the park knows that he's running."

N.L. scout: "I'll go with Thome, but I'm not real wild about it. (Dodgers manager) Joe Torre has been trying to get him ready to pinch hit, and he has not looked good. Pierre might win a game for them with defense, when they get Manny (Ramirez) out of left field."



HIDEKI MATSUI



VLADIMIR GUERRERO

Which potential free agent should opponents fear more: Yankees DH Hideki Matsui or Angels DH Vladimir Guerrero?

A.L. scout: "That time Vlad missed in July really seemed to help him. When he came back, he didn't look as old. He's still dangerous because there is absolutely no way to pitch him. He hits the ball off his shoelaces."

N.L. scout: "Matsui's been really good in the second half, lots of good at-bats. I like him against lefthanders because he really keeps his front shoulder in and hangs in there against them."

— Gerry Fraley

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SN'S POSTSEASON POWER POLL



A.J. Burnett



Clayton Kershaw



Joe Saunders



Jimmy Rollins



Ryan Franklin



Chad Billingsley



Carlos Gonzalez



Nick Blackburn



Curtis Granderson

1.
YANKEES

SP **A.J. Burnett**. His stuff rivals that of any pitcher in baseball, but he has no playoff experience and posted a 4.33 second half ERA.

3.56. Walks allowed by the Yankees per nine innings. The Angels and especially the Red Sox have patient hitters.

"They have the right pieces this year. That's the bottom line. They get it done. They keep the key pieces—Derek Jeter, Jorge Posada, Mariano Rivera—and they keep adding every year." — **Rangers OF Marlon Byrd**

August 6. They beat Boston for the first time this season, after dropping their first eight against the Red Sox. This win started a four-game sweep that pushed Boston into the wild-card race.

2.
RED SOX

SP **Clay Buchholz**. He went 6-1 down the stretch, but he allowed a combined 13 runs in his last two starts and hasn't faced a playoff team since mid-August.

86.8. Percent of opponents' stolen base attempts successful against the Red Sox, the worst in the majors.

"You can't take anything for granted. They have a good lineup. They have a good pitching staff, a bullpen, just like us. They are a tough team to beat, in the postseason or not." — **Yankees SP A.J. Burnett**

August 18. They had just dropped two of three in Texas (and the wild-card lead to the Rangers) when they swept the Blue Jays at Rogers Centre and reclaimed the wild card for good. It was the start of an 11-3 run.

3.
ANGELS

SP **Joe Saunders**. He has a 2.55 ERA since returning from the D.L. in late August; in his eight previous starts, his ERA was 9.63.

9.22. Hits allowed per nine innings by Angels relievers, the worst mark among playoff teams.

"They just have a lot of real good hitters. The guys at the top get on and steal bases. They go from first to third, then somebody will hit a sacrifice fly and their runs will just add up." — **Yankees SP Andy Pettitte**

July 10. They had just lost two of three to Texas (and first place in the A.L. West to the Rangers) but then swept three from the Yankees. In doing so, they took over first place for good and started a 17-3 run.

4.
PHILLIES

SS **Jimmy Rollins**. Philadelphia's leadoff hitter rebounded in the second half but finished with a .296 on-base percentage.

.254. The Phillies' batting average with runners in scoring position, the lowest among playoff teams.

"They can go all the way. They have a lineup that can put 10 or 12 runs on you, so you might not even need to worry about closing." — **Mets RF Jeff Francoeur**

July 3. They began a 9-1 homestand with a win (on the heels of a 1-8 homestand in June). The victory also gave them sole possession of first place, which they never relinquished.

5.
CARDINALS

RP **Ryan Franklin**. The Cards' closer had five great months, but he allowed 25 baserunners in his final 10 games.

.234. The Cardinals' batting average against lefthanders, the lowest mark in the majors this season.

"They are really scary because you have two No. 1 starters on the same team. They don't make a lot of mental mistakes. And I think that lineup is one of the toughest in the National League." — **Marlins C John Baker**

August 1. Newly acquired LF Matt Holliday homered twice. It was the first win during a month in which St. Louis went 20-6 and increased its N.L. Central lead from a half-game to 10 games.

6.
DODGERS

SP **Chad Billingsley**. He had a 5.20 ERA in the second half and was rocked in his two NLCS starts last October.

141. Double plays hit into by the Dodgers, more than any other N.L. playoff team.

"Clayton Kershaw has been really, really dirty this year. They have a great team and a great manager and a great lineup. And their bullpen is as tough as any in baseball." — **Cubs SP Ryan Dempster**

May 13. A 9-2 win at Philadelphia provided confidence after the Dodgers had started 1-4 without LF Manny Ramirez. It was the first win in a 12-3 run that boosted Los Angeles' N.L. West lead from three games to nine.

7.
ROCKIES

OF **Carlos Gonzalez**. The speedy youngster looked overmatched early in the season, but Gonzalez had 11 stolen bases, 12 homers and a .320 average after the All-Star break.

.235. The Rockies' batting average on the road. Only the Pirates hit worse away from home this season.

"Their pitching has been solid for them this second half, and (righthanded starter) Ubaldo Jimenez is probably one of the nastiest guys in the league." — **Marlins CF Cody Ross**

June 4. Less than a week after Jim Tracy replaced Clint Hurdle as manager, the Rockies salvaged the series finale at Houston. That win began a 17-1 run and moved them into playoff contention.

8.
TWINS

SP **Nick Blackburn**. He went 8-4 with a 3.06 ERA before the All-Star break but was 3-7 with a 5.47 ERA in the second half.

34.4. Percentage of the Twins' inherited runners who scored, the worst among all playoff teams.

"They make your starters throw a lot of pitches. They are able to hit and run, move guys over. Plus, they have guys up and down the lineup who can hit a home run, which helps." — **Royals catcher John Buck**

August 21. An extra-innings win in Kansas City started a five-game winning streak (their first of the season). Minnesota won 28 of its final 41 regular-season games.

9.
TIGERS

CF **Curtis Granderson**. Detroit's leadoff hitter had a career-high 30 homers but a career-worst .248 batting average.

337. Runs the Tigers scored on the road, the lowest total for any playoff team.

"When you have Justin Verlander, when you have Edwin Jackson and Rick Porcello, those are the types of pitchers who can shut you out. And we know what Miguel Cabrera can do in a short series." — **former Blue Jays manager Buck Martinez**

July 24. They swept a doubleheader from the White Sox, who entered the games tied with Detroit for the A.L. Central lead (and riding the momentum of Mark Buehrle's perfect game).

— Chris Bahr, Bill Eichenberger, Ryan Fagan

The final ruling: Yankees win

SN'S BASEBALL EXPERTS
WEIGH IN WITH THEIR
WORLD SERIES PROJECTIONS

CHRIS BAHR, senior editor

☉ **Yankees over Phillies.**

New York's lefthanders (CC Sabathia, Andy Pettitte) will outduel Philadelphia's (Cliff Lee, Cole Hamels).

RYAN FAGAN, staff writer

☉ **Yankees over Phillies.**

Philadelphia won't be able to contain New York's offense, and the Yankees' starters will keep the Phillies' sluggers in check.

TOM GATTO, senior editor

☉ **Yankees over Cardinals.**

Chris Carpenter and Adam Wainwright won't be able to tame New York's deep, powerful offense in a long series.

STAN MCNEAL, staff writer

☉ **Yankees over Phillies.**

New York's relentless lineup will prove too powerful for the defending World Series champions.

The dissenting opinion: I'm picking the Dodgers to take home the trophy



Todd Jones

The Dodgers were my pick to go all the way in spring training, and I'm sticking with them as my World Series champions. But what other story lines should we track as the playoffs begin?

The St. Louis threat. The Cardinals are fun to watch, and Tony La Russa, although eccentric, is a great skipper. He will have the boys hitting on all cylinders. St. Louis is the biggest threat to the Dodgers in the N.L., so watch out, Mannywood. As for the Phillies, it is hard to repeat. Their starting pitching is good, but their bullpen is too big an issue.

A-Rod's relaxation level. The Yankees should go very deep into the postseason, and Alex Rodriguez has faded enough into the background that all of the focus won't be on him. He can simply step back and play ball. Every time he has felt like the Yankees can't do it without him, they have gone nowhere. New York's new formula for success: Let Mark Teixeira and Derek Jeter be in charge of being awesome and let A-Rod hit and play defense.

The aces' abilities. The pitchers on the spot this postseason? Every team's No. 1 starter. These horses are the keys to the playoffs, especially in short series. The No. 1 starter assumes all of the pressure and

takes the heat off the bullpen, allowing the relievers to focus on piecing together the other games. The team with the better No. 1 will win the series.

Unlikely offensive contributors. Unlike the aces, superstar hitters aren't always the heroes. That distinction often falls on the lesser-known guys, the huddled masses, so to speak. The focus of all playoff matchups is who *isn't* going to be allowed to beat you. So, the 1-2 hitters and the bottom-of-the-lineup bats must do the trick. Dodgers second baseman Orlando Hudson is my pick to achieve stardom in such a role this postseason.

A winning approach. Superstars have been here and done that, but those players who haven't played in the postseason and/or in a big market aren't used to the intensity that comes with October baseball. Once guys realize great players treat postseason games just like regular-season games, they will understand why superstars can perform on this level. Because you can't simply flip a switch in the postseason, the greats make sure it is already turned on.

Todd Jones, a former major league closer, is a regular contributor to Sporting News.

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MLB

Graves 5, Marlins 2



Braves SS Taneli Hatanen drove in a run with an eight-inning single.

It may be more or never for Atlanta and Florida to make a run at the N.L. wild card. Monday, the Braves got a leg up with a 5-2 win. The four-game set continues today when Tim Lincecum takes the mound for the first time this season for Atlanta. **Page 22**

• N.L. West leads up Dodgers and Thome, Oakland Rockies acquire Contreras. **Page 6**

• Power Poll, **Page 28**

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Presession

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Baseball

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30 teams in 30 days
The countdown to NHL's
Oct. 1 opening night begins
with the Avalanche
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TUESDAY
SEPTEMBER 1, 2009

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Quarterback keepers? These starters risk losing jobs if they bomb in Week 1

BY MATT HAYES

mhayes@sportingnews.com

The last time Kevin Riley was in such a prominent position, it all slipped away on an October night in 2007 when No. 2-ranked California became another side note in the easiest season of all. The Bears have a special team again, and this time Riley is the starting quarterback from the start-out the freshman who played for an injured starter and took a sack with the clock winding.



Matt Barkley



Bill Stull



Stephen Garcia



Chris Todd

Rubio stays in Spain
Twolves' efforts to
pry PG from team
in Barcelona fall
short **Page 44**

SEE A DIFFERENT GAME
VOLUME 2 • ISSUE 41

NFL

Vikings 17, Texans 10



Bravos have completed 15 of 16 passes for 142 yards and one touchdown.

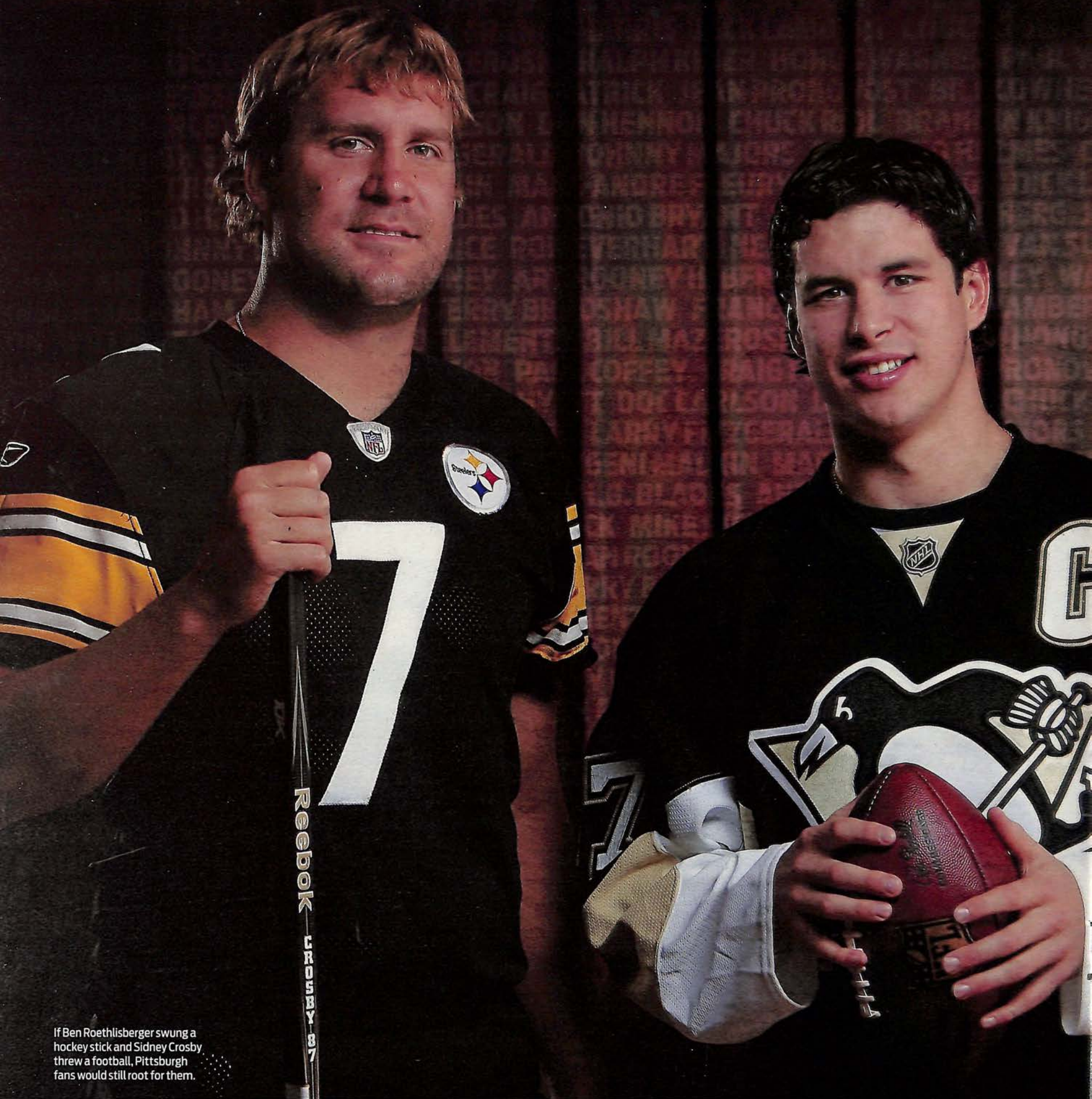
Favre efficient in extended action

Monday night in Houston likely marked Brett Favre's final game as a starter, and the Bears' regular season opener at Cleveland, Favre (19-for-36, 142 yards, TD in three quarters) met Vikings coach Brad Childers' standards of "just being efficient, being able to move us up and down the field and get us in the end zone." Here's how we're reading Favre before Week 1.

What we've learned

• Favre knows the offense, it didn't take long for Favre to find his groove in a rhythmic, short passing game within a balanced attack.

• He's a can handle being No. 2. Favre is willing to hand off the ball — and the spotlight — to Aaron



If Ben Roethlisberger swung a hockey stick and Sidney Crosby threw a football, Pittsburgh fans would still root for them.

Black and Gold mettle

OUR BEST SPORTS CITY HAS THREE RIVERS,
TWO LEAGUE CHAMPIONS AND ONE VERY
SPECIAL VIBE WHEN IT COMES TO
SUPPORTING ITS HOME TEAMS

It was, as a famous Pittsburgher liked to say, a beautiful day in the neighborhood.

The world champion Steelers were kicking off their title defense against the Titans. The world champion Penguins were down in D.C., Stanley Cup in tow, to meet the president. Native son Dave Wannstedt was at practice on the South Side, preparing his unbeaten Pitt football team for the weekend's win at Buffalo.

That was September 10, 2009, and here's how beautiful it was in this year's Best Sports City: Pittsburgh's Pirates did not—repeat, did *not*—lose that day. (So it was an off-day. Beauty is in the eye of the long-suffering beholder, OK?)

"It's been quite a year in Pittsburgh, with the Steelers winning the Super Bowl, the Penguins winning the Stanley Cup and our local college football and basketball teams having successful seasons as well," Mayor Luke Ravenstahl says. "Sports fans in Western Pennsylvania have had a lot to be proud of these last 12 months. Pittsburgh truly is the City of Champions once again."

In fact, it may always be sunny in that other city across the state, but citizens there can lay claim to only one title

team during the past 12 months. Over here—where an elected official changed his name temporarily to "Steelerstahl," just so, y'know, there was no question of which team he supported when Baltimore came to town for an NFL playoff beatdown in January—you've got two titles, basketball tournament teams aplenty, a bowl-bound and Backyard Brawl-winning football team.

Oh, and fans like no other.

"We thank them," Super Bowl 43 MVP Santonio Holmes says, "for being our 12th man."

It's been a great year, indeed. Twelve months like no other city experienced or could expect to experience. Unless one of Pittsburgh's adopted sons has his way.

"You're born into the Steeler Nation. People get into hockey, and they love the Penguins," says Steelers receiver Hines Ward, who in his 12th season in Pittsburgh could count as a naturalized citizen. "The Pirates were great back in the day, and hopefully they can be again. If they can get back on track, they'll have the whole trifecta—football, hockey and baseball."

And wouldn't *that* be a beautiful day.

— Bob Hille

Photo by Duane Rieder for SN

8 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT 2009'S BEST SPORTS CITY



Mike DeCourcy

Growing up around the Three Rivers, there are certain things one comes to understand about 2009's Best Sports City. Foremost is that any list of best American pizza parlors that includes a bunch of thin-crust drywall to the exclusion of Vincent's Pizza Park in

Forest Hills, Pa., is as worthless as a Derek Bell baseball card.

A Pittsburgher, though, understands there's more that makes the city unique, and so much of it has to do with the city's sports teams:

1. Steelers fans are everywhere. TV announcers who talk about how well Steelers fans "travel," as though the team were hoping for a Peach Bowl bid, just don't get it. Thousands of Pittsburghers live elsewhere because their steel mill or brewery or newspaper shut down during a previous recession. When the Black and Gold is in town, its fans don't travel any farther than the home team's.

2. Pittsburgh is more than just Pittsburgh... Those who attend Pittsburgh city schools—and compete in what's known as the City League—obviously are Pittsburghers. But they're not alone. The Western Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic League comprises 136 suburban school districts and private schools, some more than 50 miles from the city. If you went to a WPIAL school, you consider yourself a Pittsburgher.

3. ...but it's not East Brady. East Brady kids do not compete at WPIAL schools, so the only time you'll hear the town included as part of Pittsburgh is when someone tries to bolster the region's "Cradle of Quarterbacks" bona fides by adding Jim Kelly. Hey, Kelly was terrific, but it's not like he's needed in the discussion: Unitas, Namath, Montana, Marino ... and Charlie Batch, of course.

4. Nobody smart messes with the Towel. Before a playoff game against the Steelers in January 1995, Cleveland back Earnest Byner stepped on a Terrible Towel. The Browns lost—and abandoned their city within a year. Cincinnati's T.J. Houshmandzadeh cleaned his shoes with a Towel after a December 2005 victory in Pittsburgh. The Bengals lost six of the next seven against the Steelers. Tennessee back LenDale White stomped on a Towel late in a December 2008 victory. The Titans lost their next two, including a first-round playoff game. Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon blew his nose on a Terrible Towel before the 2009 Super Bowl.

You know how that turned out. Don't bet on Gordon for re-election.

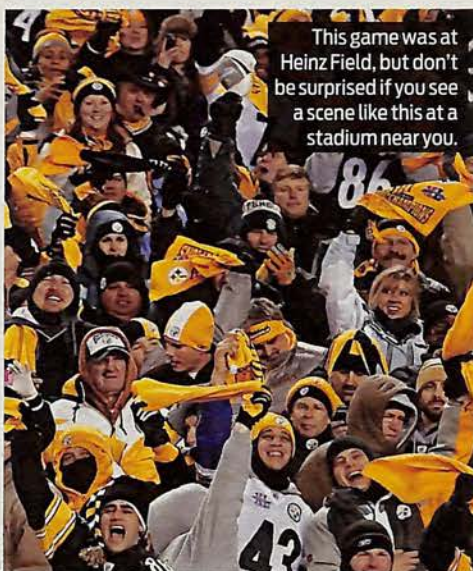
5. Mario was one of a kind. Mario Lemieux had an impressive career, one that included two Stanley Cups, but his greatest feat might have been the night in 1988 when he scored five goals—five ways: even strength, power play, shorthanded, penalty shot, empty net.

6. The city's teams support one another. An All-American basketball player at Pitt—and Hill District native—DeJuan Blair, with Batch's help, hitched a ride in the Steelers' Super Bowl victory parade.

7. Pittsburgh turned football into art. The highest-grossing production in the history of the esteemed Pittsburgh Public Theater is *The Chief*, a one-man show about late Steelers owner Art Rooney, starring character actor Tom Atkins (a Pittsburgh native, of course). The show will be revived for the sixth time this January, and Atkins is expected to pass the 100-performance mark in the role, unheard of for a regional theater.

8. "We're No. 1" means different things to Pittsburgh's different teams. Since the 1970s, the Steelers, Pirates and Penguins have owned the No. 1 overall draft pick seven times. The Steelers spent theirs on Terry Bradshaw (1970). The Penguins used theirs on Lemieux (1984), Marc-Andre Fleury (2003) and Sidney Crosby (2005). The Pirates? They got Jeff King (1986), Kris Benson (1996) and Bryan Bullington (2002). That explains a lot.

Sporting News college basketball writer Mike DeCourcy was born and raised in Pittsburgh and is a graduate of Point Park University. The Steelers, Penguins and Pirates have won a combined 12 championships in his lifetime.



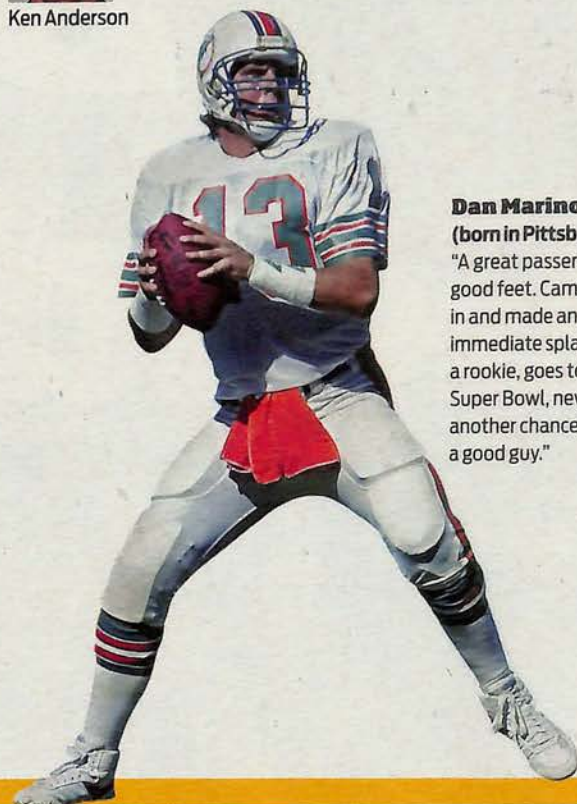
This game was at Heinz Field, but don't be surprised if you see a scene like this at a stadium near you.

THE CRADLE OF QUARTERBACKS



Ken Anderson

Sporting News played word association with Steelers quarterbacks coach Ken Anderson, who had a 16-year pro career as a QB for the Bengals (despite being born in Batavia, Ill., and not the Pittsburgh area):



Dan Marino (born in Pittsburgh)
"A great passer. Had good feet. Came in and made an immediate splash as a rookie, goes to the Super Bowl, never has another chance. Just a good guy."



WHAT I LOVE ABOUT PITTSBURGH

'Super Mario' is hockey

By Sidney Crosby, Penguins center

Mario Lemieux has done everything he could to have an impact on the city of Pittsburgh, on and off the ice. He's been a huge part of the success of the Penguins here since Day 1.

When he came here, hockey was somewhat popular, but he brought a lot of attention to the game. He did it everywhere but especially in Pittsburgh. And when the team was in trouble financially, he had a big part in helping it stay.

Are the Penguins still in Pittsburgh without him? Probably not. It's hard to say, "What if...?" I know he had a big part first in coming



Crosby (right) couldn't ask for a better role model than Lemieux.

here and raising the popularity of the sport. Then, when it looked like they might leave, he certainly was a big part of the Penguins staying.

For me personally, he's been someone I can observe. I'm still living with him, and it's been a unique opportunity to be there and learn from all the things he's gone through. He's at the point in his life where he knows what's important, and he knows all these things through life experience.

Having him around, I was able to accelerate my learning curve.

— As told to Craig Custance



Joe Montana
(New Eagle, Pa.)

"One of only two quarterbacks—Terry Bradshaw being the other—with four Super Bowl victories. He executed Bill Walsh's offense so well. Those two were a perfect match for each other."



Joe Namath
(Beaver Falls, Pa.)

"Wow. The initial big-timer. He was the first big signer in the AFL. One of the first athletes that became a true celebrity. Bachelors III, all the pictures, guaranteeing the Super Bowl win. He had a great arm and a great release."



Johnny Unitas
(Pittsburgh)

"He was meticulous. A field general in the days when quarterbacks called their own plays. His mastery of the game in each situation—it's hard to put anyone above him at the quarterback position."



George Blanda
(Youngwood, Pa.)

"Ageless. I played against George. It was my rookie year (1971), and I was playing because Virgil Carter was hurt. I threw a touchdown pass at the 2-minute warning in Oakland to give us the lead. The Raiders needed a touchdown to win, and they put George Blanda in. He takes them 80 yards for a touchdown and beats us."



Johnny Lujack
(Connellsville, Pa.)

"I knew about him because I was a Bears fan. An interesting guy coming into the league, having great success with the Bears. I think he was a little bit of a flashy guy for his era. He also was a tough guy."

— Dennis Dillon



WHAT I LOVE ABOUT PITTSBURGH

The Backyard Brawl

By **Hugh Green**,
Pitt All-American
defensive end, unbeaten vs.
West Virginia from 1977-80

My most vivid memory is the Mountaineer guy with his musket. My goal was to make sure he didn't shoot that thing because that meant West Virginia wasn't scoring.

I remember the fans at their field. One year, a guy climbed on our bus so it couldn't move. In warmups once, I got hit in the helmet with a screw. Anything could happen in the Backyard Brawl.





We played back then to see who was the best team in the East, with Penn State. Now, you've got the Big East championship. The game always has meant a lot in the Pittsburgh area. And 10, 20, 30 years from now, that game will be just as important.

— As told to Dave Curtiss



A FOUR-STAR REVIEW

Some of Steel City's finest—past and present—answer questions about playing in Pittsburgh

	ONE WORD TO DESCRIBE THE FANS	PITTSBURGH STAR YOU WOULD MOST LIKE TO PLAY WITH	COOLEST THING ABOUT THE CITY	BIGGEST RIVAL	WHAT SHOULD PITTSBURGH'S SPORTS MOTTO BE?
 DEJUAN BLAIR EX-PITT BASKETBALL	Wild	Hines Ward	Fan support	The Browns	We're the Steel City. They've got that already.
 RYAN DOUMIT PIRATES	Passionate	Evgeni Malkin	The view of downtown Pittsburgh from PNC Park	It would have to be the Brewers for us.	The City of Champions
 MARC-ANDRE FLEURY PENGUINS	Awesome	Hines Ward	Support from the fans. They are always there, they're constant. No matter what, they're always behind us.	Philly, definitely. And Washington, but more Philly, I think.	The City of Champions. That is the motto, isn't it?
 HINES WARD STEELERS	Passionate	Sidney Crosby	The city backs up their sports teams, win, lose or draw.	The Browns. Anything that has to do with beating up on Cleveland and making their life miserable for one day, the city of Pittsburgh loves that.	Blue-collar city. Hard-working but nothing flashy.

— Dennis Dillon, Mike DeCourcy, Stan McNeal, Craig Custance

THE CITY OF CHAMPIONS' FIXER-UPPER

Pittsburgh has one losing team, and it's a big one. In 2009, the Pirates suffered—or maybe it's the fans who suffered—their 17th consecutive losing season, the longest such streak ever in the major leagues, NFL, NBA or NHL. Players from the Pirates' last winning team, the 1992 division champions, told *Sporting News* what the Bucs need to do to return to their winning ways.

★ **Andy Van Slyke:** "The perception is that they're more worried about making money than winning. One of the things that would really help a team like Pittsburgh is revenue-sharing should go right into player salary. That would force them to do something they're not currently doing."

★ **Doug Drabek:** "You have to get up to .500 and build off that. Then you keep your young guys together long enough to let them learn about themselves and gain confidence. That's how you start to build team chemistry."

★ **Zane Smith:** "You have to keep your good players. Look at all the trades they made this season, and what do they have now? A bunch of young pups. You can't use the small-market excuse."

★ **Don Slaught:** "You have to draft the right people and follow the best course: developing them. They don't have the funds to compete for free agents."

— Stan McNeal, Matt Crossman



WHAT I LOVE ABOUT PITTSBURGH

It's a basketball town, too

By **Jamie Dixon**, Pitt coach

I do feel like I live in a basketball town. There are different seasons here. There's plenty of room for us, as we've proven.

We've got three sports that are completely sold out: Penguins, Pitt basketball and Steelers, obviously.

When we arrived, there was a lot of apathy around Pittsburgh basketball, but this was a sports town. I saw the potential, what it could be. The winning helped, the Petersen Center helped, and so did the university and its growth.

When we started, there were empty seats in Fitzgerald Field House. We now have a waiting list of 5,000 for tickets. That's amazing.

— As told to Mike DeCourcy

You don't know **Pittsburgh** like I know **Pittsburgh**



By **Dave Wannstedt**, Pitt football coach

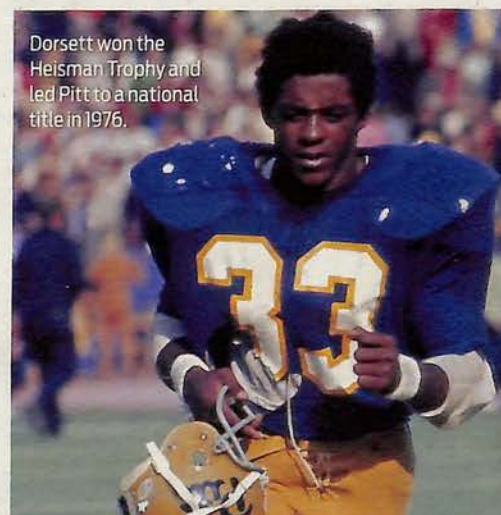
Dave Wannstedt, born and raised in Pittsburgh, captained the 1973 Pitt Panthers' Fiesta Bowl team. More than 30 years later, he came home to coach his alma mater, where from his office windows in the Pitt football practice facility he can see both the steel mills where he worked as a teenager and the downtown skyline that represents a very different Steel City.

My feelings about sports in this town run deep. Gosh, I love to think back on all the old times. I can still *feel* the day in 1960 when Bill Mazeroski hit that home run to win the World Series. I can see our old black-and-white TV, and my dad, Frank, running across the street and jumping in my Uncle Bill's '57 Plymouth convertible. I was 8 years old; the thrill when they pulled around to pick me up was unbelievable. We drove from Baldwin in the South Hills 6 miles or so to downtown—what a celebration! When we got home, the car was filled with confetti.

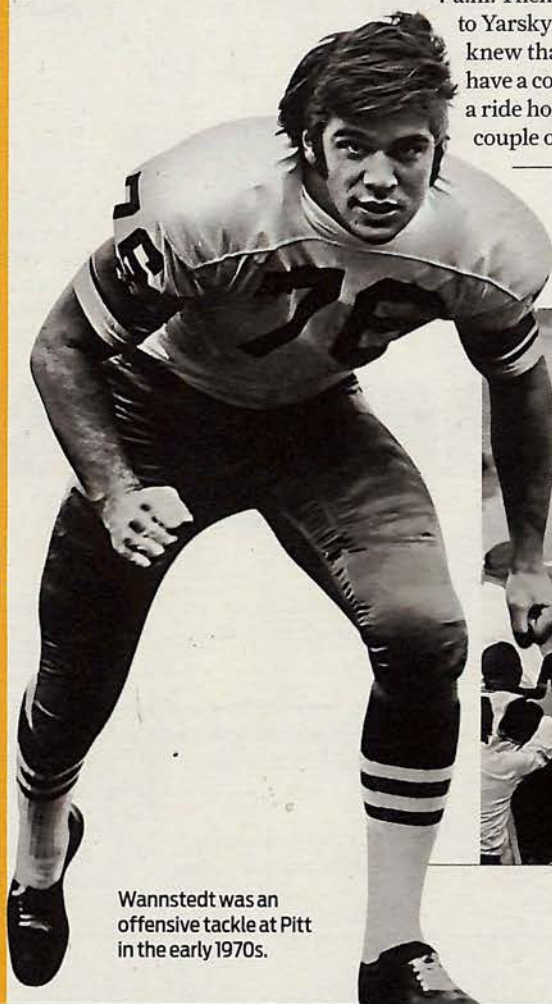
The first thing I had to do as a kid after waking up was clean soot off my dad's windshield. We were about 4 miles across the river from where the facility shared by the Steelers and my team, the Pitt Panthers, sits now. A steel mill used to be there—the exact location where my dad worked before he died. You don't think that means something to me? When I played at Pitt, I'd work in that mill in the summers from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. Then we'd walk across the street to Yarsky's—every guy in Pittsburgh knew that old place. My dad would have a couple of beers, and I'd get a ride home with him, sleep for a couple of hours and go to practice.

A long time ago, I was at a sports banquet in Pittsburgh. Chuck Noll, the Super Bowl champion coach, was there. Willie Stargell, the World Series hero, was there. Tony Dorsett, the star of the 1976 national champion Pitt Panthers, was there. I was an assistant coach on that team under Johnny Majors, so I felt it, too—like a champion. That's what people spoke about that night: Pittsburgh was the "city of champions." The pride in that room was tremendous.

Many years later, when I was coaching the Dolphins, I had dinner one night with Marty Schottenheimer, Joe Namath and Mike Ditka at Mike's restaurant in Naples, Fla. We sat in that booth talking and laughing until



Dorsett won the Heisman Trophy and led Pitt to a national title in 1976.



Wannstedt was an offensive tackle at Pitt in the early 1970s.

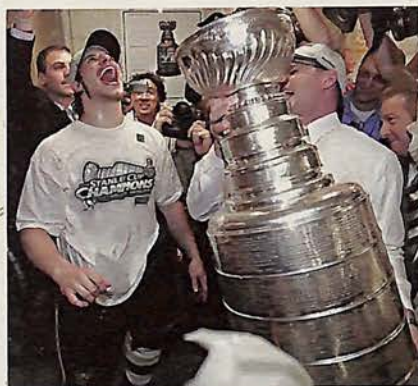


Mazeroski's home run sent the Pirates into a frenzy and sent the Wannstedts downtown to celebrate.

2 a.m. There was no Super Bowl talk. The whole conversation was Western PA football—about sports being a way out so a kid could go to college and not have to work in the mills. There was a lot of pride in *that* room, too.

I was down on the ice for Game 6 of the Stanley Cup finals this year at good ol' Mellon Arena. To have a chance to witness that was truly amazing. The devotion of our city's fans—and how so many of them use sports as a release from the daily grind of life—is never lost on me. Pittsburgh fans epitomize commitment. As tough as things might be, if you get a chance to go to a Pitt-West Virginia game or a Pens game or a Steelers game, or even Friday night fireworks at PNC Park, you're going to feel better.

Even today's stars, such as Crosby, are regular guys who reflect Pittsburgh's blue-collar work ethic.



Noll led the Steelers to four Super Bowl titles in the 1970s.

Whether it's the CEO of U.S. Steel or the guy running the body shop on the other side of the street, Pittsburgh's people share a common bond with their sports teams. I've coached in Miami, Chicago, Dallas and Los Angeles, and the fans here are the most loyal I've seen. If you go to a Steelers game or a Pitt game, you will find a bare minimum of opposing fans at the stadium. We support our own around here.

One of my favorite things about the big-time sports scene here is the absence of jealousy. Yeah, I know it's a Steelers town first. But Mr. Rooney, the great owner of the Steelers, and his son Art, who was a year behind me at Pitt, are at all our football games, our basketball games, Pens games. Mike Tomlin—you talk about a heck of a coach—comes out to our practices and talks to our players. It's all very unique. You don't see it in other cities, where everybody is competing for the dollar. We're competing for the dollar here, too, but we don't act like it.

You don't see the big egos around here, either. There isn't a finer representative of sports in this city than Mario Lemieux, and you know what? He's just a regular guy. It's a blue-collar, *people* town—not the Miami-L.A. fashion show. Who's driving what car? For crying out loud, Mr. Rooney pulls in at the complex at a quarter to 9, gets out of his little Pontiac and goes to work. The Sidney Crosbys and Troy Polamalus and the other stars of our teams, they reflect that same personality. I think when you come here and live here and are part of the sports scene, you reflect the city more than it reflects you.

—As told to Steve Greenberg



Art Rooney II doesn't just love the Steelers. He loves all Pittsburgh sports.

HOOPS IN PITTSBURGH IS ...

The city of Pittsburgh enjoyed perhaps its greatest college basketball season in 2008-09, with Pitt and Robert Morris making the NCAA Tournament and resurgent Duquesne earning an NIT bid. To those schools' coaches, college basketball in Pittsburgh means ...



Jamie Dixon, Pitt



Mike Rice, Robert Morris



Ron Everhart, Duquesne

"Sellouts, atmosphere, energy, passion and pride. We experienced a 600 percent attendance increase and sold out all 125 basketball games since moving into the Petersen Center in 2002. 'The Oakland Zoo,' our student section, provides the spirit and energy and gives us a great homecourt advantage."

— Jamie Dixon, Pitt

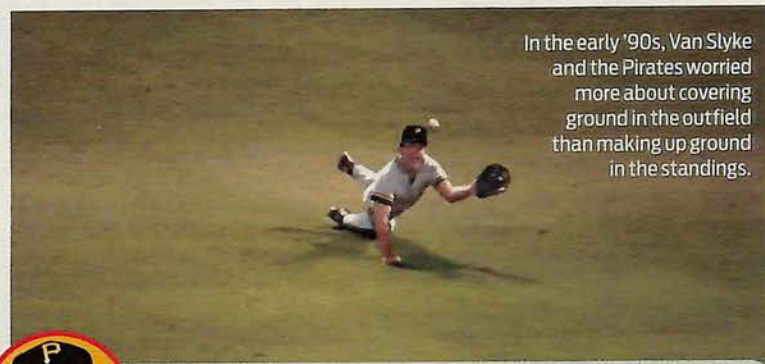
"Success. With Pitt, Duquesne and Robert Morris each reaching postseason tournaments ... it brought back feelings of the late 1970s and early '80s when the three programs were all successful on the national level. It was great to be a part of that renaissance."

— Mike Rice, Robert Morris

"Toughness—combined with a competitive attitude and a gritty work ethic. Like Pittsburgh, our local Division I programs reflect that. College basketball—like the city itself—has reinvented itself here. The college game is becoming more and more popular among fans, and more quality recruits are flocking to these programs."

— Ron Everhart, Duquesne

— Mike DeCourcy



In the early '90s, Van Slyke and the Pirates worried more about covering ground in the outfield than making up ground in the standings.



WHAT I LOVE ABOUT PITTSBURGH

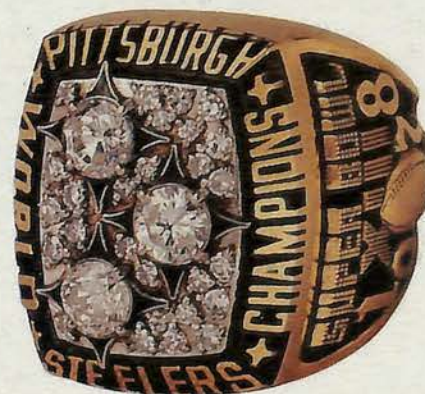
The Pirates back in the day

By Neil Walker, Pittsburgh native, 2004 first-round draft pick and 2009 September call-up

My fondest memories are of the early '90s, when I was 7 or 8 years old watching Andy Van Slyke run around the outfield with Barry Bonds out there, and the last All-Star Game there at Three Rivers Stadium.

There was a buzz and an aura with baseball. It's still there, that baseball aura; it's just waiting to come back out.

— As told to Ryan Fagan



THE SUPER BOWL RING: A BLACK AND GOLD STANDARD

The ring's the thing, but only because it stands for so much more. "All of the hard work that you put into the offseason, going through the brutality of two-a-days at camp, going through 17 weeks of the regular season," Super Bowl 43 MVP Santonio Holmes says, "fighting through everything that you want in the playoffs and finally getting to that stage and winning—it makes everything complete." In the days, weeks, months and years afterward, there is time to reflect.

Sporting News talked to six Steelers—one for each of the club's Super Bowl rings—about what being a champion means to them:



By MEL BLOUNT
SUPER BOWLS 9, 10, 13 AND 14

Winning six Super Bowls comes with an obligation to continue to make the community better and make the people around you better.

47 I attempt to do it with the Mel Blount Youth Home, reaching out to the less fortunate, trying to give them hope and lead by example.

When we were winning championships, my young nephews and nieces would tell their peers I was their uncle. You had kids coming out, wanting to take pictures and get autographs. We're world champions. People are looking to us for more than just pictures and autographs. They're looking for leadership. That's the responsibility that comes with winning.



By JACK HAM
SUPER BOWLS 9, 10, 13 AND 14

I grew up in this area. My father was such a Steelers fan. It was a tough team, but it would end up losing. It drove fans crazy. Art Rooney, he's too nice of a guy, he's

59 not tough enough on his players—that was the image they had.

We changed an entire image, 40 years of being a tough team but not good enough. We changed that with that first Super Bowl.

Then we won back to back twice. We took the best shot from everybody out there on two occasions and it didn't matter. We were still the champions.



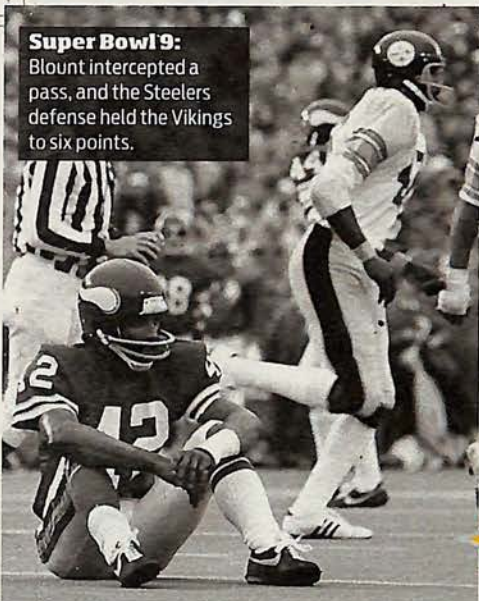
By JOHN STALLWORTH
SUPER BOWLS 9, 10, 13 AND 14

It was a confirmation that the methods the Rooneys incorporated in building the team, the methods Chuck Noll used in coaching and inspiring us were

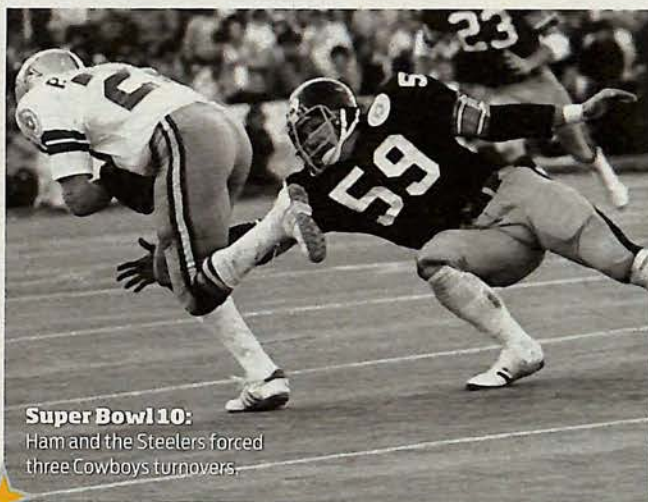
82 good—were better—than anybody else's.

Those early Super Bowl wins came when Pittsburgh was not the greatest place in the world to live. Steel mills were shutting down. Folks were out of work. Our success was maybe the one thing in a week during the football season that they could hang their hat on, and say, "We're somebody." They were as much a part of our success as any guys on the field.

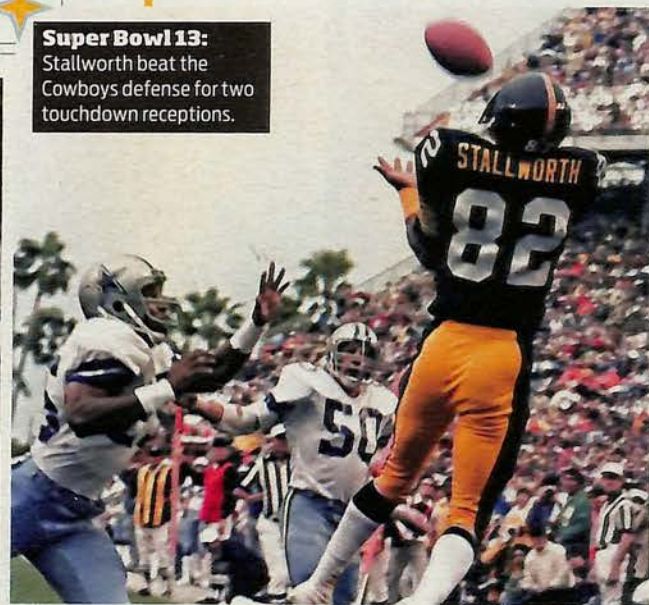
Super Bowl 9: Blount intercepted a pass, and the Steelers defense held the Vikings to six points.



Super Bowl 10: Ham and the Steelers forced three Cowboys turnovers.



Super Bowl 13: Stallworth beat the Cowboys defense for two touchdown receptions.





**By BENNIE CUNNINGHAM
SUPER BOWLS 13 AND 14**

It's a mark of excellence. There's so much that has to be put into place to become a champion. It's far more than just luck. There's a lot of preparation that goes into it.

89 You reach a degree of confidence as you work hard toward that goal. That's what we did during my years. We didn't go into the season thinking of anything less than going all the way.



**By TROY POLAMALU
SUPER BOWLS 40 AND 43**

It's very special because this area is very special. There have been a lot of great players, great quarterbacks, great linebackers, great everything.

43 From the high schools to Pitt to the Steelers, Pittsburgh has a huge legacy in baseball, football and hockey, and even in the foundation of this country. What's nice is that legacy is carried on through sports.



**By SANTONIO HOLMES
SUPER BOWLS 40 AND 43**

It definitely changes your life. You will always be remembered as a champion regardless of whether you win it one time or four times. You will always be remembered for

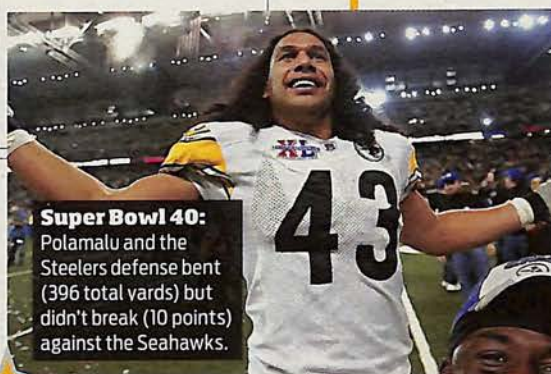
10 that team you played on and for participating in that game as Super Bowl champions.

The fans love it if you can bring home a championship to a city that wants a championship every year. Knowing that, we have the team to do it and the fan support to travel with us to every game, regardless of where we are playing.

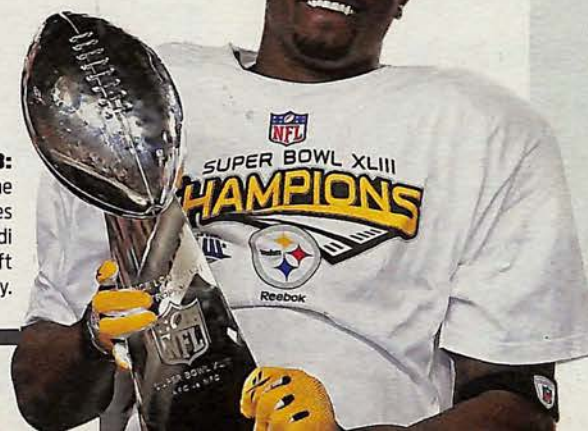
— As told to Matt Crossman and Dennis Dillon



Super Bowl 14: Cunningham (left) caught two passes and teammate Lynn Swann against the Rams.



Super Bowl 40: Polamalu and the Steelers defense bent (396 total yards) but didn't break (10 points) against the Seahawks.



Super Bowl 43: After beating the Cardinals, Holmes held the Lombardi Trophy, then left with the MVP trophy.



WHAT I LOVE ABOUT PITTSBURGH

Steelers, past and present

**By Mike Tomlin,
Steelers coach**

The teams from both Steelers Super Bowl eras are very special because of the men who made up those teams.

You had great individual players who were willing leaders and * would rise to the occasion, yet they never put themselves ahead

of the team. Both eras had wide receivers who were Super Bowl MVPs, big-game quarterbacks and dominant, physical defenses.

The ability to make big plays when you need them is what defines championship-level teams, and the Steelers from both eras were able to produce big plays when they needed them most.

— As told to Dennis Dillon



KEYSTONE THROWDOWN: PHILLY VS. THE 'BURGH

Arizona Cardinals wide receiver **Sean Morey**, who has played for the Steelers and Eagles, compares and contrasts Pennsylvania's two biggest sports cities, which are Nos. 1 and 2 in this year's Best Sports City rankings.



PHILADELPHIA

PITTSBURGH



THE FANS



Philadelphia. "It almost borders on the verge of insanity in terms of how passionate Eagles fans are about their team. Igglees, I should say."



Pittsburgh. "The difference is that Pittsburgh fans, through thick and thin, are supportive. They love their players. It's a small community. It feels really personal."

THE FIELDS



Lincoln Financial Field, Philadelphia. "The Linc is state of the art. Everything you could imagine, that you could think of, to make it a modern facility, they did it."



Heinz Field, Pittsburgh. "The coolest thing about Heinz Field were the fans sitting in the seats and (seeing) the players before the game—Hines Ward, Jerome Bettis, Joey Porter—guys who made playing for the Steelers an honor. Before we took the field, I felt like I was playing for something so much bigger than myself."

THE FOODS



Cheesesteak in Philadelphia. "I had never tasted anything better in my whole life. And my dad's a lobsterman. They're that good."



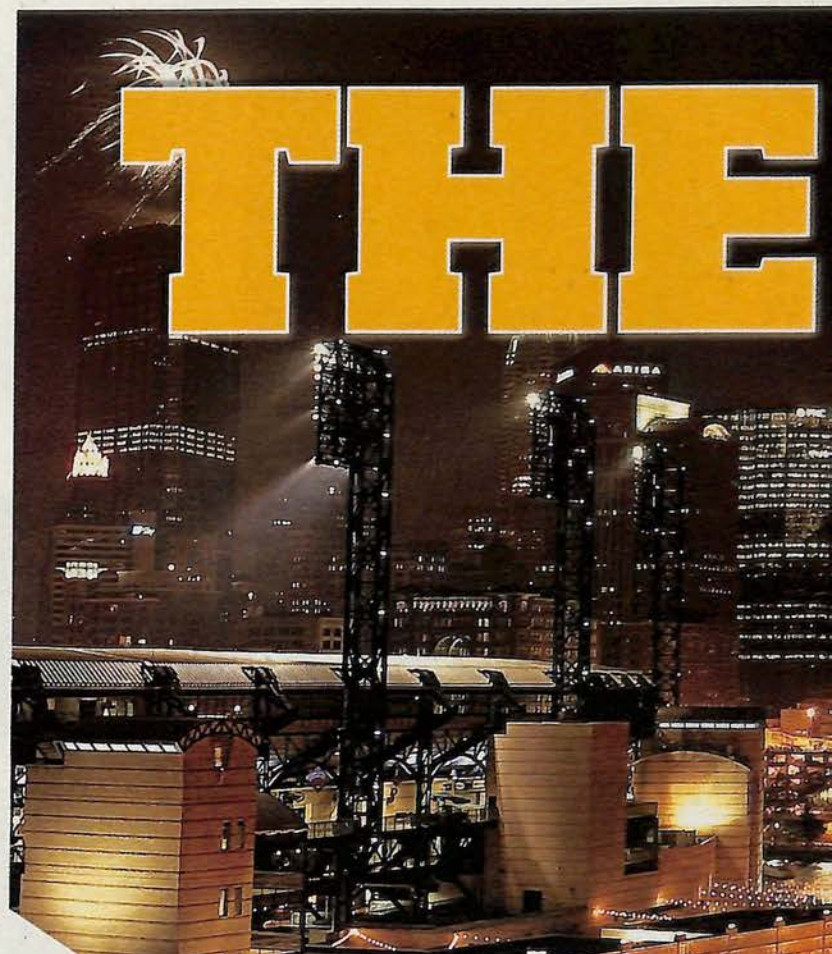
Primanti Brothers in Pittsburgh. "Probably be the closest comparable choice of sandwich. But I don't think it really truly measures up."

I LOVED BOTH PLACES. BUT I WON'T MISS ...

The cold in Philadelphia. "When I went back to play in Philly last season, I loved walking around on South Street the night before the game and just feeling the cold. But by the time the game reached the fourth quarter and the game was out of reach, and we struggled, the cold hits you."

The cold in Pittsburgh. "At Heinz Field, I always felt like it was playing backyard football. I was just having fun. Getting blasted by (the Bears' Brian) Urlacher on a punt and then throwing a snowball at him and hitting him in the helmet as he walked away."

— Matt Crossman



1. PITTSBURGH

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| 2. Philadelphia | 30. St. Louis |
| 3. Boston | 31. San Diego |
| 4. Chicago + Evanston | 32. Portland |
| 5. Los Angeles | 33. Oakland + Berkeley |
| 6. New York | 34. Columbus |
| 7. Phoenix + Tempe | 35. San Antonio |
| 8. Miami | 36. Toronto |
| 9. Dallas-Fort Worth | 37. Oklahoma City + Norman |
| 10. Detroit + Ann Arbor + Ypsilanti | 38. Austin, Texas |
| 11. Houston | 39. Vancouver |
| 12. Nashville | 40. Buffalo |
| 13. Atlanta | 41. Gainesville, Fla. |
| 14. Washington | 42. Calgary |
| 15. Tampa-St. Petersburg | 43. Storrs, Conn. |
| 16. Minneapolis-St. Paul | 44. East Lansing, Mich. |
| 17. Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, N.C. | 45. Montreal |
| 18. Denver + Boulder | 46. San Francisco |
| 19. Salt Lake City + Provo | 47. Memphis |
| 20. Indianapolis | 48. State College, Pa. |
| 21. Anaheim | 49. Kansas City |
| 22. Cleveland | 50. Jacksonville |
| 23. Charlotte | 51. Green Bay |
| 24. San Jose + Palo Alto + Santa Clara | 52. Seattle |
| 25. New Orleans | 53. Edmonton |
| 26. Milwaukee | 54. Ottawa |
| 27. Orlando | 55. Sacramento |
| 28. Baltimore | 56. Columbia, Mo. |
| 29. Cincinnati | |

399

OUR ANNUAL LIST OF THE BEST SPORTS CITIES

- 57. Tuscaloosa, Ala.
- 58. Blacksburg, Va.
- 59. Tucson, Ariz.
- 60. Stillwater, Okla.
- 61. Lawrence, Kan.
- 62. Morgantown, W.Va.
- 63. Lubbock, Texas
- 64. College Park, Md.
- 65. Oxford, Miss.
- 66. Clemson, S.C.
- 67. Louisville, Ky.
- 68. Eugene, Ore.
- 69. Boise, Idaho
- 70. Iowa City, Iowa
- 71. Corvallis, Ore.
- 72. Lincoln, Neb.
- 73. West Lafayette, Ind.
- 74. Tallahassee, Fla.
- 75. Madison, Wis.
- 76. South Bend, Ind.
- 77. Athens, Ga.
- 78. Lexington, Ky.

- 79. Baton Rouge, La.
- 80. Knoxville, Tenn.
- 81. Columbia, S.C.
- 82. Tulsa, Okla.
- 83. Winston-Salem, N.C.
- 84. Champaign-Urbana, Ill.
- 85. Waco, Texas
- 86. College Station, Texas
- 87. Piscataway, N.J.
- 88. Auburn, Ala.
- 89. Charlottesville, Va.
- 90. Syracuse, N.Y.
- 91. Manhattan, Kan.
- 92. Albuquerque, N.M.
- 93. Reno, Nev.
- 94. Fayetteville, Ark.
- 95. Starkville, Miss.
- 96. Las Vegas
- 97. Hattiesburg, Miss.
- 98. El Paso, Texas
- 99. Annapolis, Md.
- 100. Greenville, N.C.

Past No. 1s



After three No. 1 rankings in the past five years, Boston dropped to No. 3 in 2009. Don't count out the Sox, Pats, Celtics and Bruins in 2010, though. All four remain championship contenders.



YEAR	CITY
2008	Boston
2007	Detroit
2006	Chicago
2005	Boston
2004	Boston
2003	Anaheim + Los Angeles
2002	Boston
2001	New York
2000	St. Louis
1999	New York
1998	Detroit
1997	Denver
1995	Denver
1994	Cleveland
1993	Chicago

NOTE: There was no Best Sports City in 1996 as *Sporting News* expanded and refined the rating system.

MORE THAN JUST CHAMPIONSHIPS

Sporting News' Best Sports City rankings, which look at the 12 months from roughly October 2008 to October 2009, are based on point values assigned to various categories, including but not limited to won-lost records, postseason appearances, applicable power ratings, number of teams and attendance.

4 GREETINGS FROM ... CHICAGO



PAUL KONERKO, White Sox first baseman
 "The people here know their stuff. They're going to be behind you if you are working hard and performing the way you're supposed to, but they're going to get on a guy if he is not giving his all. That's fun. That's how it should be. That keeps players in Chicago honest."

— Sean Deveney

9 GREETINGS FROM ... DALLAS-FORT WORTH



JEFF COEN, Stars president
 "The north Texas area has it all: highly competitive teams in all four major sports leagues, and these teams play in arguably the top facilities in their

leagues. Add to those Texas Motor Speedway, FC Dallas, the Roughriders, Air Hogs, Fort Worth Cats, SMU, TCU and UNT and you have quality sporting options across all areas of the Metroplex, across all sports and something for each pocketbook."

— Katherine Cromer Brock

11 GREETINGS FROM ... HOUSTON



ANDRE JOHNSON, Texans wide receiver
 "People don't just like either the Texans, Rockets or Astros. The fans here will support all the teams and really know what's going on.

I've been a Rockets season-ticket holder for six years. That's the biggest thing I've seen that's different than other cities: They just really love their sports and support the teams. Even at the beginning when (the Texans) really weren't doing well, they were behind us."

— Greg Barr

26 GREETINGS FROM ... MILWAUKEE

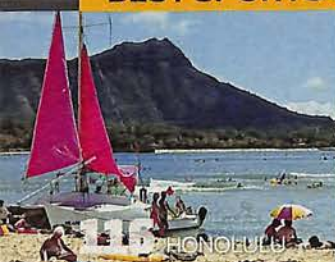


RYAN BRAUN, Brewers outfielder
 "Milwaukee has that big-city-feel without the hassle of a big city. Great people, great fans, great restaurants. It's a great place to play. The

energy the fans bring to Miller Park day in and day out is great. We really enjoy the support the city gives us; they live and die with our team."

— Mark Kass

BEST SPORTS CITY: THE OTHERS



- 101. Logan, Utah
- 102. Spokane, Wash.
- 103. Akron, Ohio
- 104. Troy, Ala.
- 105. Fort Collins, Colo.
- 106. Colorado Springs, Colo.
- 107. Moraga, Calif.
- 108. Ruston, La.
- 109. Bowling Green, Ohio
- 110. Fresno, Calif.
- 111. Omaha, Neb.
- 112. Muncie, Ind.
- 113. Pullman, Wash.
- 114. Ames, Iowa
- 115. Murfreesboro, Tenn.
- 116. Honolulu
- 117. Kingston, R.I.
- 118. Huntington, W.Va.
- 119. Bowling Green, Ky.
- 120. Laramie, Wyo.
- 121. Dayton, Ohio
- 122. Birmingham, Ala.
- 123. Oxford, Ohio
- 124. Kent, Ohio
- 125. Las Cruces, N.M.
- 126. Kalamazoo, Mich.
- 127. Athens, Ohio
- 128. Moscow, Idaho
- 129. Bloomington, Ind.
- 130. Mount Pleasant, Mich.

- 131. Jonesboro, Ark.
- 132. Denton, Texas
- 133. Lafayette, La.
- 134. DeKalb, Ill.
- 135. West Point, N.Y.
- 136. Toledo, Ohio
- 137. Monroe, La.
- 138. Richmond, Va.
- 139. Normal, Ill.
- 140. Albany, N.Y.
- 141. Niagara, N.Y.
- 142. Ithaca, N.Y.
- 143. Fargo, N.D.
- 144. Cedar Falls, Iowa
- 145. Burlington, Vt.
- 146. Peoria, Ill.
- 147. Nacogdoches, Texas
- 148. Des Moines, Iowa
- 149. Stockton, Calif.
- 150. Little Rock, Ark.
- 151. Ogden, Utah
- 152. Mobile, Ala.
- 153. Johnson City, Tenn.
- 154. Wichita, Kan.
- 155. Evansville, Ind.
- 156. Harrisonburg, Va.
- 157. Emmitsburg, Md.
- 158. Martin, Tenn.
- 159. Hempstead, N.Y.
- 160. Murray, Ky.
- 161. Binghamton, N.Y.

- 162. Huntsville, Texas
- 163. Amherst, Mass.
- 164. Norfolk, Va.
- 165. Clarksville, Tenn.
- 166. Lexington, Va.
- 167. Carbondale, Ill.
- 168. Corpus Christi, Texas
- 169. Lawrenceville, N.J.
- 170. Santa Barbara, Calif.
- 171. Missoula, Mont.
- 172. Radford, Va.
- 173. Morehead, Ky.
- 174. Lynchburg, Va.
- 175. Thibodaux, La.
- 176. Olean, N.Y.
- 177. Richmond, Ky.
- 178. Fairfield, Conn.
- 179. Worcester, Mass.
- 180. Springfield, Mo.
- 181. Pocatello, Idaho
- 182. Providence, R.I.
- 183. Orem, Utah
- 184. Riverside, Calif.
- 185. Chattanooga, Tenn.
- 186. Terre Haute, Ind.
- 187. Charleston, S.C.
- 188. Vermillion, S.D.
- 189. Stony Brook, N.Y.
- 190. Bozeman, Mont.
- 191. Macon, Ga.

- 192. Newark, Del.
- 193. Beaumont, Texas
- 194. Greeley, Colo.
- 195. Youngstown, Ohio
- 196. Fort Wayne, Ind.
- 197. Davis, Calif.
- 198. Montgomery, Ala.
- 199. Cullowhee, N.C.
- 200. Valparaiso, Ind.
- 201. Hammond, La.
- 202. Jackson, Miss.
- 203. San Marcos, Texas
- 204. Towson, Md.
- 205. Williamsburg, Va.
- 206. Cheney, Wash.
- 207. Poughkeepsie, N.Y.
- 208. Brookings, S.D.
- 209. Cedar City, Utah
- 210. Flagstaff, Ariz.
- 211. Boiling Springs, N.C.
- 212. Clinton, S.C.
- 213. Rock Hill, S.C.
- 214. Asheville, N.C.
- 215. Spartanburg, S.C.
- 216. Durham, N.H.
- 217. DeLand, Fla.
- 218. Bethlehem, Pa.
- 219. New Haven, Conn.
- 220. Daytona Beach, Fla.
- 221. Jersey City, N.J.

- 222. Cookeville, Tenn.
- 223. Lake Charles, La.
- 224. Jacksonville, Ala.
- 225. Boone, N.C.
- 226. Buies Creek, N.C.
- 227. Shreveport, La.
- 228. Bakersfield, Calif.
- 229. Hampton, Va.
- 230. Princeton, N.J.
- 231. Grand Forks, N.D.
- 232. New Britain, Conn.
- 233. Charleston, Ill.
- 234. Hamden, Conn.
- 235. Fort Myers, Fla.
- 236. Orangeburg, S.C.
- 237. San Luis Obispo, Calif.
- 238. Wilmington, N.C.
- 239. Elon, N.C.
- 240. Conway, S.C.
- 241. Hartford, Conn.
- 242. Savannah, Ga.
- 243. Lewisburg, Pa.
- 244. Dover, Del.
- 245. Greensboro, N.C.
- 246. Orono, Maine
- 247. Farmville, Va.
- 248. Hamilton, N.Y.
- 249. Macomb, Ill.
- 250. Statesboro, Ga.
- 251. Prairie View, Texas
- 252. Edwardsville, Ill.

- 253. Itta Bena, Miss.
- 254. Easton, Pa.
- 255. High Point, N.C.
- 256. Natchitoches, La.
- 257. Conway, Ark.
- 258. Pine Bluff, Ark.
- 259. Hanover, N.H.
- 260. Jupiter, Fla.
- 261. Scranton-Wilkes-Barre, Pa.
- 262. Fontana, Calif.
- 263. Loudon, N.H.
- 264. Martinsville, Va.
- 265. Talladega, Ala.
- 266. West Long Branch, N.J.
- 267. Rochester, N.Y.
- 268. Quad Cities (Moline-East Moline-Rock Island, Ill.-Davenport-Bettendorf, Iowa)
- 269. Smithfield, R.I.
- 270. Augusta, Ga.
- 271. Loretto, Pa.
- 272. Erie, Pa.
- 273. Greenville, S.C.
- 274. Teaneck, N.J.
- 275. Huntsville + Normal, Ala.
- 276. Bristol, Tenn.
- 277. Brooklyn, Mich.

28 GREETINGS FROM ... BALTIMORE



CAL RIPKEN, Orioles ironman and Hall of Famer
"I always thought Baltimore is just a fantastic sports town. It has a history that

goes back with the Orioles and their excellence for development in baseball. The Orioles were considered a model organization, and I grew up watching the Colts, who have a rich history as well. I always look at Baltimore as a small town that has a city feel to it; hard-working, good knowledgeable fans, and they're very passionate about sports. I grew up in Aberdeen (Md.), so I consider myself a local in being a part of that history. It's just how you grow up. Watching the Orioles and Colts when I was coming up, and now it's the Orioles and Ravens."

— Ryan Sharrow

30 GREETINGS FROM ... ST. LOUIS



CHRIS CARPENTER, Cardinals pitcher
"When baseball season starts, it's 100 percent baseball around here. Everywhere I

go, that's all I hear about. It's neat. The standing ovations you see the fans here give to opposing players show that they love baseball. When I tell players about playing here, I mention the city, the organization and the fans. The support for baseball is here all the time."

— Stan McNeal

32 GREETINGS FROM ... PORTLAND



NATE MCMILLAN, Trail Blazer's coach
"We don't have the big universities or other (major league) teams in the city, so the fans are really

locked into the Blazers and they follow them very closely for that reason. The fans are supportive because they're in touch with the organization; they feel what the organization is feeling, whether it's good or bad, because they're following us so closely. When things are going well, a city such as Portland is definitely one of the best places to be."

— Andy Geiger

34 GREETINGS FROM ... COLUMBUS



KURT COLEMAN, Ohio State safety
"Columbus is one of the few cities that you can come to and you'll believe there's a professional

(football) team here. Everybody bleeds scarlet and gray. You can come out to a game day, and you'll really become a Buckeye fan. You can go anywhere else, and they don't have fans like we do. Ohio State travels. It's just a great city. It's so diverse—that's why a lot of food companies experiment with things in Columbus, because we bring so much to the table. The new foods—they always try it out in Columbus."

— Matt Crossman



281 SONOMA, CALIF.



315 PAWTUCKET, R.I.



352 BURLINGTON, IOWA

- 278.** Darlington, S.C.
- 279.** Long Pond, Pa.
- 280.** Manchester, N.H.
- 281.** Sonoma, Calif.
- 282.** Watkins Glen, N.Y.
- 283.** Viera, Fla.
- 284.** Dunedin, Fla.
- 285.** Edinburg, Texas
- 286.** Clearwater, Fla.
- 287.** Port Charlotte, Fla.
- 288.** Port St. Lucie, Fla.
- 289.** McAllen, Texas
- 290.** Portland, Maine
- 291.** Sarasota, Fla.
- 292.** Kennesaw, Ga.
- 293.** Grand Rapids, Mich.
- 294.** Bismarck, N.D.
- 295.** Tacoma, Wash.
- 296.** Uncasville, Conn.
- 297.** Allentown, Pa.
- 298.** Sioux Falls, S.D.
- 299.** Bradenton, Fla.
- 300.** Carlsbad, Calif.
- 301.** Cromwell, Conn.
- 302.** Hilton Head Island, S.C.
- 303.** Kapalua, Hawaii
- 304.** Kissimmee, Fla.
- 305.** La Quinta, Calif.
- 306.** Lakeland, Fla.
- 307.** Midland, Texas
- 308.** Monterey, Calif.

- 309.** Oakville, Ontario
- 310.** Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.
- 311.** Vero Beach, Fla.
- 312.** Verona, N.Y.
- 313.** Winnipeg, Manitoba
- 314.** Norwich, Conn.
- 315.** Pawtucket, R.I.
- 316.** Bridgeport, Conn.
- 317.** Hershey, Pa.
- 318.** Kodak, Tenn.
- 319.** Lowell, Mass.
- 320.** Reading, Pa.
- 321.** Springdale, Ark.
- 322.** Bowie, Md.
- 323.** Jackson, Tenn.
- 324.** Cape Girardeau, Mo.
- 325.** Hamilton, Ontario
- 326.** Harrisburg, Pa.
- 327.** Latrobe, Pa.
- 328.** Trenton, N.J.
- 329.** Westminster, Md.
- 330.** Mankato, Minn.
- 331.** Bourbonnais, Ill.
- 332.** Cortland, N.Y.
- 333.** Zebulon, N.C.
- 334.** Altoona, Pa.
- 335.** Georgetown, Ky.
- 336.** Napa, Calif.
- 337.** River Falls, Wis.
- 338.** Kannapolis, N.C.
- 339.** Rockford, Ill.

- 340.** Springfield, Mass.
- 341.** Adelanto, Calif.
- 342.** Albany, Ga.
- 343.** Charleston, W.Va.
- 344.** Midland, Mich.
- 345.** Wilmington, Del.
- 346.** Cedar Rapids, Iowa
- 347.** Tri-Cities (Pasco-Kennewick-Richland, Wash.)
- 348.** Woodbridge, Va.
- 349.** Princess Anne, Md.
- 350.** Eastlake, Ohio
- 351.** Modesto, Calif.
- 352.** Burlington, Iowa
- 353.** Lake Elsinore, Calif.
- 354.** Lakewood, N.J.
- 355.** Salem, Va.
- 356.** Geneva, Ill.
- 357.** Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.
- 358.** Frederick, Md.
- 359.** Kinston, N.C.
- 360.** Lancaster, Calif.
- 361.** San Bernardino, Calif.
- 362.** Myrtle Beach, S.C.
- 363.** Rome, Ga.
- 364.** Visalia, Calif.
- 365.** Aberdeen, Md.
- 366.** Amarillo, Texas
- 367.** Clinton, Iowa
- 368.** Danville, Va.

- 369.** Salisbury, Md.
- 370.** Beloit, Wis.
- 371.** Elizabethton, Tenn.
- 372.** Appleton, Wis.
- 373.** Hickory, N.C.
- 374.** Salem-Keizer, Ore.
- 375.** Idaho Falls, Idaho
- 376.** Princeton, W.Va.
- 377.** Grambling, La.
- 378.** Bluefield, W.Va.
- 379.** Everett, Wash.
- 380.** Great Falls, Mont.
- 381.** Hagerstown, Md.
- 382.** Williamsport, Pa.
- 383.** Kingsport, Tenn.
- 384.** Wappingers Falls, N.Y.
- 385.** Pulaski, Va.
- 386.** Lorman, Miss.
- 387.** Batavia, N.Y.
- 388.** Bristol, Va.
- 389.** Casper, Wyo.
- 390.** Greeneville, Tenn.
- 391.** Oneonta, N.Y.
- 392.** Billings, Mont.
- 393.** Burlington, N.C.
- 394.** Helena, Mont.
- 395.** Jamestown, N.Y.
- 396.** Winooski, Vt.
- 397.** Yakima, Wash.
- 398.** Troy, N.Y.
- 399.** Auburn, N.Y.

➔ 399 GREETINGS FROM ... AUBURN, N.Y.

A better sports future, by invention

Auburn, N.Y., do not worry. Yes, you are dead last on the 2009 Best Sports Cities list, thanks to the Auburn Doubledays' 26-49 season (and the fact that many cities and towns don't even qualify for the list). But you'll get yourself out of this.

Necessity is the mother of invention—and there are a lot of mothers of inventors from Auburn. The guy who invented the technology for movies with sound, the guy who designed an early fire hydrant and the guy who dreamed up work time clocks are from Auburn. William Kemmler invented dying by the electric chair when he was the first person executed that way, right there in Auburn Prison.

Even baseball was once thought to have been invented by an Auburnian, Abner Doubleday. Turns out he probably had nothing to do with it, but the town's team is named after him anyway. "I'm not taking any position on the controversy," says Doubledays G.M. Carl Gutelius, smiling. "Absolutely not."

But Gutelius, an Auburnian himself, does take a position on the Doubledays: They'll get better. The Blue Jays affiliate won the Class A New York-Penn League title in 2007 and has a history of turning out future major league stars, particularly pitchers. Dear Auburnians, if that is not enough to convince you that your town will rise again, rely on the old saying invented by ex-Auburn player Tug McGraw: "Ya gotta believe."

— Matt Crossman



Doubleday may not have invented baseball, but he has a Class A team named after him.

➔ 40 GREETINGS FROM ... BUFFALO



TURNER GILL,
Buffalo football coach
"People are losing their jobs. When things don't go right and it looks like things are not going to work

out, it gives them hope. Seeing a football program turn around, then (people realize) their own lives can turn around."

— Tim O'Shei

➔ 51 GREETINGS FROM ... GREEN BAY



NICK BARNETT,
Packers linebacker
"The thing that's different about Green Bay is the fans are the owners. They are the most knowledgeable

in the NFL, and they're at every game. Other cities have passionate fans, too, but ours actually own a part of the team."

— Mark Kass

➔ 57 GREETINGS FROM ... TUSCALOOSA, ALA.



MIKE JOHNSON,
Alabama offensive lineman
"People down here in Tuscaloosa, this is it for them. You won't walk around anywhere without seeing an Alabama shirt.

People just eat, sleep and breathe Alabama football. You're always recognized wherever you go, and everybody wants to shake your hand or talk to you. That's a big thing for me. I think another thing that people don't really realize is that they have such good food in Tuscaloosa. You've got Dreamland Bar-B-Ques and stuff like that, Chuck's Fish. The food's just really good. I think that's a huge thing—that's a nice thing in Tuscaloosa."

— Bob Hille

➔ 88 GREETINGS FROM ... AUBURN, ALA.



ANTONIO COLEMAN,
Auburn defensive end
"You can't miss Tiger Walk, and you can't miss rolling Toomer's Corner and the flying of the

eagle. I got to roll Toomer's Corner for the first time earlier this year on the Big Cat Weekend (a recruiting event). And the flying of the eagle—I got to see it on a recruiting visit when they brought the eagle over to the stadium. I actually go by and play with the eagle sometimes."

— Ken Bradley



In Green Bay, a meeting with the owners is just a Lambeau Leap away.

2 OUT OF 3 AIN'T BAD

Votes from **121 EXPERTS**—including 35 Hall of Famers—
put a pair of Penguins in the trio at the top of
SN'S 50 BEST NHL PLAYERS



1
SIDNEY
CROSBY

2
ALEX
OVECHKIN

3
EVGENI
MALKIN



Neil Armstrong
Hall of Famer
Donald Audette
'01 All-Star RW
Don "Elbows" Awrey
Won 2 Cups as Bruins D
Andy Bathgate
Hall of Famer
Curt Bennett
2-time All-Star C
Sergei Berezin
'97 all-rookie team F
Henry Boucha
U.S. Olympian in '72
Butch Bouchard
Hall of Famer
Phil Bourque
Won 2 Cups as
Penguins LW/D
Johnny Bower
Hall of Famer
Scotty Bowman
Hall of Famer
Brad Boyes
Blues C
Valeri Bure
2000 All-Star RW
Sean Burke
3-time All-Star G
Pat Burns
Coached 4 NHL teams
Dan Bylsma
Penguins coach
Bobby Carpenter
First American-born player to
score 50 goals in a season
Jimmy Carson
'89 All-Star C
Len Ceglarski
U.S. Olympian in '52
Shawn Chambers
Won Cups as Devils, Stars D
Guy Charron
Coached Flames, Ducks
Peter Chiarelli
Bruins G.M
Jacques Cloutier
4,764 saves in 12 seasons
Craig Conroy
Flames C
Murray Costello
Hall of Famer
Jim Craig
Helped U.S. win '80 gold
Marc Crawford
Stars coach
Jim Cummins
12-year RW
Eric Daze
'02 All-Star MVP
Alex Delvecchio
Hall of Famer
Kevin Dineen
2-time All-Star RW

CROSBY: JENNIFER POTHESER / GETTY IMAGES; OVECHKIN: NICK LAHAM / GETTY IMAGES; MALKIN: NICK LAHAM / GETTY IMAGES

PANEL



Dick Duff
Hall of Famer

Patrik Elias
Devils LW

Bob Errey
Won 2 Cups as Penguins LW

Phil Esposito
Hall of Famer

Fern Flaman
Hall of Famer

Emile Francis
Hall of Famer

Bill Gadsby
Hall of Famer

Dariny Gare
Sabres retired his No. 18

Michel Goulet
Hall of Famer

Tony Granato
Former Avalanche coach

Bill Guerin
Penguins All-Star RW

Glenn Hall
Hall of Famer

Bob Hartley
Coached Avalanche to '01 Cup

Derian Hatcher
Captain of '99 champion Stars

Denis Herron
'81 Vezina winner

Paul Henderson
2-time All-Star LW

Ron Hextall
'87 Conn Smythe winner

Charlie Hodge
'64, '66 Vezina winner

Bobby Holik
2-time All-Star C

Ken Holland
Red Wings G.M.

Harley Hotchkiss
Hall of Famer

Phil Housley
7-time All-Star D

Willard Ikola
U.S. Olympian in '56

Craig Janney
563 assists in 12 seasons

Claude Julien
Bruins coach

Patrick Kane
Blackhawks All-Star RW

Rick Kehoe
'81 Lady Byng winner

Red Kelly
Hall of Famer

Tim Kerr
3-time All-Star C

Brian Kilrea
Hall of Famer

Petr Klima
Won '90 Cup as Oilers W

Uwe Krupp
'91 All-Star D

Mike Krushelnyski
Won 3 Cups as Oilers LW/C

Nick Kypreos
Won '94 Cup as Rangers LW

Elmer Lach
Hall of Famer

Lou Lamoriello
Devils G.M.

Dave Langevin
'83 All-Star D

Rod Langway
Hall of Famer

Reed Larson
3-time All-Star D

Peter Laviolette
Coached Hurricanes to '06 Cup

John LeClair
5-time All-Star LW

Dave Lewis
Coached Red Wings, Bruins

Dean Lombardi
Kings G.M.

Don Luce
'75 All-Star C

Lowell MacDonald
2-time All-Star RW

Howie Meeker
Hall of Famer

Barry Melrose
Coached Kings, Lightning

Rick Middleton
'82 Lady Byng winner

Ken Morrow
Helped U.S. win '80 gold

Bryan Murray
Senators G.M.

Terry Murray
Kings coach

Lou Nanne
Former North Stars G.M.

Harry Neale
Coached Canucks, Red Wings

Adam Oates
No. 6 in career assists

Mike O'Connell
Former Bruins G.M.

Brian O'Neill
Hall of Famer

Doug Palazzari
Former USA Hockey director

Craig Patrick
Hall of Famer

Pierre Pilote
Hall of Famer

Larry Pleau
Blues G.M.

David Poile
Predators G.M.

Denis Potvin
Hall of Famer

Brian Propp
5-time All-Star LW/RW

Bob Pulford
Hall of Famer

Joel Quenneville
Blackhawks coach

Henri Richard
Hall of Famer

Todd Richards
Wild coach

Jack Riley
Coached U.S. to '60 gold

Gordie Roberts
Won 2 Cups as Penguins D

Jeremy Roenick
9-time All-Star C

Patrick Roy
Hall of Famer

Jim Rutherford
Hurricanes G.M.

Martin St. Louis
'04 Hart winner

Joe Sakic
'01 Hart winner

Bob Sauve
'80 Vezina winner

Denis Savard
Hall of Famer

Darryl Sittler
Hall of Famer

Ed Snider
Hall of Famer

Peter Stastny
Hall of Famer

Mike Sullivan
Former Bruins coach

Darryl Sutter
Flames G.M.

Bill Torrey
Hall of Famer

Bryan Trottier
Hall of Famer

Barry Trotz
Predators coach

Norm Ullman
Hall of Famer

Garry Unger
7-time All-Star C

Rogie Vachon
'68 Vezina winner

Ken Wregget
Led '94-'95 goalies in wins

Wendell Young
Won 2 Cups as Penguins G

John Ziegler
Hall of Famer

1

SIDNEY CROSBY

C, PENGUINS

⊙ Hall of Famer and Penguins co-owner **MARIO LEMIEUX**: "Sid is such a phenomenal all-around player that it's easy to forget he's only 22 years old. And it's not just his pure talent; what amazes you even more is his work ethic and determination, the way he won't be denied. The fact that he led us to the Stanley Cup as a 21-year-old captain tells you everything you need to know."

3 WAYS CROSBY WILL BEAT YOU



By Penguins
G.M. RAY SHERO

1. Off the rush. Leaving our zone, he just takes off through the neutral zone, getting that puck with speed. He's 5-11, 6-foot, but to me he's a power forward. His speed, explosiveness and balance through the neutral zone—he's really dangerous.

2. Down low. He's a threat behind the net with balance and puck protection. With the puck at his feet, he's really, really good. He creates offense and is really tough to contain.

3. Faceoffs. He's kind of a go-to guy for us now on the draws on both ends of the ice. The faceoff thing is something he's taken a lot of pride in.

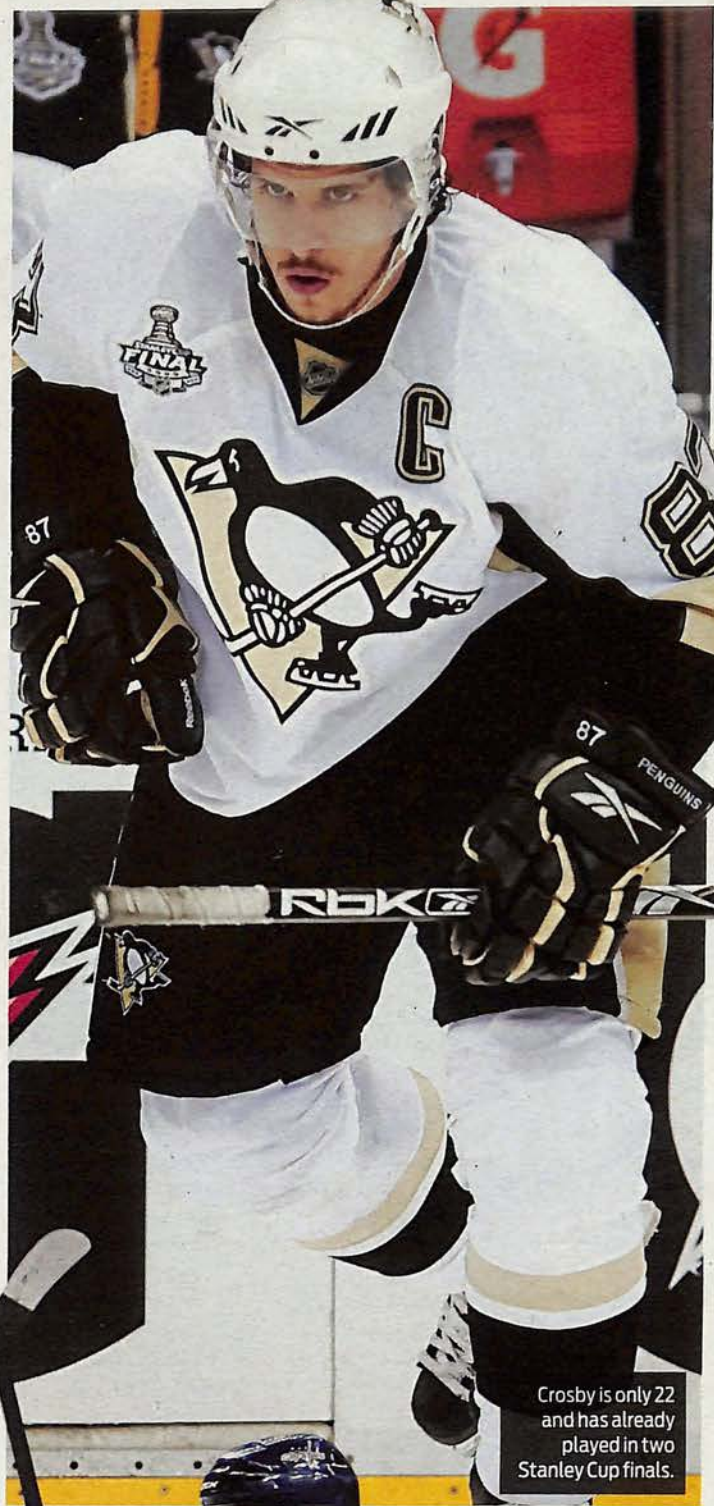
— As told to Craig Custance

2

ALEX OVECHKIN

LW, CAPITALS

⊙ Capitals owner **TED LEONISIS**: "Alex's talent is only matched by his passion for the game, our city, our fans and, most importantly, our ultimate goal. He has made his case as the best player in the game. Like our team, his singular goal is to bring home the Cup."



Crosby is only 22 and has already played in two Stanley Cup finals.



Alex Ovechkin

3

EVGENI MALKIN

C, PENGUINS

⊙ Hall of Famer and former Penguins **C BRYAN TROTTER**: "He's got great anticipation, strength on the puck and vision. He has a hell of a shot. He's capable of skating at 90 miles an hour, stickhandling, shooting and making plays. You can just see from his first year, he looks much more confident on the ice. He looks like he belongs."

SID SAYS ...

SN asked our No. 1, Sidney Crosby, for his No. 1. **THE ANSWER: TEAMMATE EVGENI MALKIN**

"I think Geno is pretty much a guy who brings a lot of different things. He's a great scorer, he's big, and he has speed. He definitely proved that his consistency is there, and in order to win you need to play in both ends. It's great for us. We're lucky to have him."

— Craig Custance

4

NICKLAS LIDSTROM

D, RED WINGS



Nicklas Lidstrom

⊙ Former Red Wings All-Star **D REED LARSON**: "I don't know what he got on his SAT or ACT, but Nick Lidstrom is probably one of the smartest defensemen to ever play the game. He's just so dependable, so solid, balanced—with as good as he is defensively, he can still play the power play, shoot the tip-in, send people in on breakaways. He's an NFL quarterback. He's running the show, running the play."

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO FACE ALEX OVECHKIN



By Devils **G MARTIN BRODEUR**

When you're a goalie and are on the ice, you should know where he is at all times. So when he gets the puck, you shouldn't be surprised that he's coming at you 100 miles an hour. It's a good challenge. Whenever he grabs the puck, you can just feel the

energy in the building go up, regardless of whether he's playing at home or on the road. People are there to watch him. People get excited, even if they are there to root against him. And for me, it's a great challenge to go one-on-one with the top guy.

— As told to Bill Eichenberger



Malkin may be No. 3 on the list, but he has the support of the top guy for the top spot.

3 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT NICKLAS LIDSTROM



By **BRENDAN SHANAHAN**, Lidstrom's former teammate

1. He has a dry sense of humor. He's a funny guy. He doesn't tell jokes. If you want to hear his humor, it's usually under his breath.

2. He likes to grab a beer with the boys. He's very quiet, but when something is going on, he doesn't miss a beat.

3. He plays a finesse game, but he actually spends a lot of time in the weight room. So he's actually much stronger than people realize.

—As told to Bill Eichenberger

9 MARTIN BRODEUR G, DEVILS

Devils G.M. **LOU LAMORIELLO**: "He's a student of the game, and he's a student of his opponents. He watches games. He studies players. He knows their idiosyncrasies. As a result, he anticipates well and he's fundamentally sound."



Martin Brodeur

5 PAVEL DATSYUK C, RED WINGS

Hall of Famer and former Red Wings **C STEVE YZERMAN**: "He's as skilled as far as puckhandling as any player in the game. He has an incredible work ethic, outstanding in all areas. He's really worked at every part of his game since coming over here in his early 20s, and he's improved in every area of the game."

FIVE ON NO. 5

Red Wings D **BRIAN RAFALSKI**: "He's aware of where everybody on the ice is at all times. If you get open, he'll find you."

Red Wings RW **KRIS DRAPER**: "He's the most dominant two-way player in the game. He's a guy who, when you need a goal, is going to be on the ice, and, when you're protecting a lead, he's going to be on the ice."

Red Wings LW **TOMAS HOLMSTROM**: "He's doing stuff out there, one-against-one, one-against-two—you don't think he can do it, and he comes up with the puck. Playing on the same line with him a couple years ago, I'd go out to try and help him out, but he doesn't want any help because then I drag another guy to him."

Red Wings RW **JOHAN FRANZEN**: "He gets out of a mess. Three guys around him, and he gets out with the puck. He's the only guy who can pull things like that off."

Red Wings D **NIKLAS KRONWALL**: "He's a magician. He can do things with the puck you've never seen before."

—Craig Custance



Datsyuk has either maintained or increased his points total in each of his seven seasons.

6 JAROME IGINLA RW, FLAMES

Red Wings RW **TODD BERTUZZI**, Iginla's former teammate: "He's accomplished a lot—he has his gold medals. For him to solidify himself as one of the top five, 10 best—winning a Cup in this era would do that for him. But at the same time, he has a pretty sick resume."

7 HENRIK ZETTERBERG LW, RED WINGS

Penguins C **SIDNEY CROSBY**: "He's not a prolific scorer like Ovechkin and Geno (Malkin), but he's a pretty complete player. I think what he doesn't have as far as a huge shot, he makes up for because he's a complete player and really tough to play against."

8 ZDENO CHARA D, BRUINS

Penguins C **JORDAN STAAL**: "For how big he is (6-9, 255), he's a mobile player. He has a great stick, can make great plays and make the passes out of his own end. He plays tough, too. He plays mean."

THREE TEAMMATES, ONE QUESTION: WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE MARTIN BRODEUR SAVE?

D **ANDY GREENE**: "It was a game against Philly in Philly. The puck came off to Marty's right side. I wasn't sure if he was out of position or what, so I dove in there and tried to block it. I missed it, but somehow, I'm not sure how, Marty slid across and blocked it."

D **MIKE MOTTAU**: "It was in his 500th win in Philly two years ago. It was a near-side shot. It went out to Danny Briere, and

Marty spun around backward and stopped it with his stick, then covered it. It was unbelievable."

LW **JAY PANDOLFO**: "I remember one in the 2003 Stanley Cup finals against Anaheim. Sandis Ozolinsh came back door for a one-timer, and Marty came flying across and made an unbelievable save."

—Bill Eichenberger

10 VINCENT LECAVALIER

C, LIGHTNING

○ Rangers coach **JOHN TORTORELLA**, Lecavalier's former coach: "What makes him stand out is his size, his ability to see the ice, his ability to carry a puck, his ability to make a play. He has it all. He is a gifted athlete. And he put the time in to learn the game away from the puck."

11 SCOTT NIEDERMAYER

D, DUCKS

○ Former Ducks G.M. **BRIAN BURKE**: "Very few players can dictate the pace of an NHL game. Scott does it routinely. A no-maintenance superstar with great, low-key leadership skills."

12 RYAN GETZLAF

C, DUCKS

○ Ducks G.M. **BOB MURRAY**: "He's been fortunate, having played with Scott Niedermayer, whose will to win is wearing off on Ryan. Now the ball is in his court. He has a chance to be that type of player."

13 ROBERTO LUONGO

G, CANUCKS

○ Former Canucks G.M. **DAVE NONIS**, who traded for Luongo: "Aside from his God-given ability, he has a body built for playing goal. But what sets him apart is his desire to win, to stop every puck—whether it's in practice, in warmup or in the game. I've been fortunate enough to be around a lot of competitive people, but I haven't seen anyone as competitive as Roberto."

14 RICK NASH

LW, BLUE JACKETS

○ Blue Jackets coach **KEN HITCHCOCK**: "He's able to do things at full speed that many players are not able to do. He's got that maturity going where he's capable of a sense of timing—he's not overwhelmed by the stage."



Eric Staal

15 ERIC STAAL

C, HURRICANES

○ Hurricanes coach **PAUL MAURICE**: "He's still getting better—that's the frightening part. He's learning the game. He's just very, very competitive. He wants to win and really doesn't care how it gets done, doesn't care who gets the credit."

16 CHRIS PRONGER

D, FLYERS

○ Former All-Star LW **BRIAN PROPP**, Pronger's former teammate: "I rate him with leadership and everything he does almost like a Ray Bourque. He's got size and speed. He's got a great shot from the point. He's a good passer. He's got an edge—he's mean. He'll take a suspension to knock a guy out of the crease. If you add all those things together, that's such a valuable part of any team."

WHY I TRADED A FUTURE HALL OF FAME



By Ducks G.M. **BOB MURRAY**, who sent Pronger to Philadelphia in the offseason

It was no fun at all. You agonize over it. It eats away at you. But you know you have to do it for the organization. You're doing a giant disservice if you don't, but it's no fun.

Nowadays, if you can't sign the player, if you don't think you can sign the player—the dynamics have changed. You have to manage the dollar down the road. That's what that was all about.

We got Chris from Edmonton, and we paid a lot. It was time to get those assets back. Now, if we're a decent team, I have some bullets in the gun.

—As told to Craig Custance



Chris Pronger

17 ILYA KOVALCHUK

LW, THRASHERS

○ Thrashers G.M. **DON WADDELL**: "He's a game-breaker. Any time he's on the ice, we potentially can score a goal. He's a guy who can do it with his teammates or individually. He's taken the team on his back. We go as good as Kovy goes."

18 JOE THORNTON

C, SHARKS

○ Sharks coach **TODD MCLELLAN**: "He's a humble human being to begin with. It's not about Joe Thornton; it's about the team. He's a happy guy in the locker room. It means a lot to him to see the other players have success, to see the team have success. He's looking for ways to improve and get better. As a superstar, sometimes you don't have to do that."

19 ZACH PARISE

LW, DEVILS

○ Devils RW **JAMIE LANGENBRUNNER**: "Most players, they have an off night. With him, it's really hard to find those nights. I'm sure he'll say there are a lot of them, but playing with him and the way he's always moving, always going and always putting himself in situations to succeed—it's a skill I don't think you can really teach."

3 THINGS I'VE LEARNED FROM MY OLDER BROTHER



By Rangers D **MARC STAAL**

1. **Let your stick do the work.** That just means put a lot of effort into your stickhandling and the stick will do the rest.
2. **I should have a big bowl of ice cream after my pregame meal.** That is something he does before every game. It's one piece of advice, I must admit, I haven't followed.
3. **It takes a lot of work to stay in the game.** When I was younger and in juniors, he warned me about how hard I would have to work at my first training camp, just the work ethic of everyone. That was a good thing to know before I got there.

—As told to Bill Eichenberger

20 MIKE GREEN

D, CAPITALS

○ Rangers D **MICHAŁ ROZSIVAL**: "He has the ability to read a play and jump into the offense. Plus, he has a great shot and is a great skater. When he's on the ice, it seems like he makes all the right decisions. He's playing with great players, too, which makes him even better. He's definitely one of these guys who can put a puck into the net."

21 MIKE RICHARDS

C, FLYERS

○ Flyers coach **JOHN STEVENS**: "He's a very creative guy who plays with an awful lot of passion. In juniors, he could score, but some people didn't think he could score at the NHL level. What we're seeing is a guy who is very defensively responsible and also very creative and competes extremely hard on both ends of the rink."

22 MARIAN HOSSA

RW, BLACKHAWKS

○ Red Wings LW **JOHAN FRANZEN**, Hossa's former teammate: "He has a great first step out there. He's one of the quicker guys in the league; with that size (6-1, 215) it's a huge advantage for him. Also, a quick shot. He doesn't play for himself. He's a good team player who played the way the coach wanted to play."

23 JONATHAN TOEWS

C, BLACKHAWKS

○ Blackhawks coach **JOEL QUENNEVILLE**: "He's one of those guys that works on his game. He wants to be the best he can. He places a lot of emphasis on working out off the ice. He got stronger, and he improved his defense down in his own end."

24

MARC-ANDRÉ
FLEURY

G, PENGUINS

By Blues G TY

CONKLIN, Fleury's former teammate: "Athletically, I'm not sure there's anybody better than him as far as quickness and mobility. From what I've seen, it seems like he controls it a little better than he used to. He would be so athletic he (used to) get out of position. But, boy, it seems that pucks hit him in the chest nowadays. The guy is in the right spot."



Dany Heatley

26

DANY
HEATLEY

LW, SHARKS

By Hall of Famer

and former Sharks
C IGOR LARIONOV:

"I know (Jonathan) Cheechoo was playing with Joe Thornton (in San Jose), but Dany—he's a different player. He's experienced, and his scoring touch will bring more goals, more excitement and maybe more grit to the final stretch of the (Sharks') season and the playoffs."

3 REASONS HEATLEY IS
A GREAT GOAL SCORER

By Rangers
D WADE REDDEN,
Heatley's former
teammate

1. **His ability to shoot the puck from anywhere.** He has a real quick release.
2. **He gets in those tough spots.** They are not always pretty goals that he gets, but he always seems to find a way to get to those areas to score goals.
3. **He just loves scoring goals.** I skate with him in the summers a bit, and it doesn't matter if it's just for nothing, he's always trying to score. He just loves it.

— As told to Bill Eichenberger

28

PATRICK
KANE

RW, BLACKHAWKS

By Blackhawks D BRIAN CAMPBELL: "He's obviously a little undersized, so (you think) he can't be that hard to contain. But he's so deceptive and shifty that it's incredible how sneaky he is and hard to control and hard to handle. He's the type of person you don't want to lunge too hard at him or go too hard at him because he either beats you with a pass or he's going to beat you one-on-one."

25

DANIEL
ALFREDSSON

RW, SENATORS

By Former All-Star RW PAUL HENDERSON: "He really competes every night. He's also a very, very skilled playmaker and has a good touch around the net. He is a player who makes things happen, either scoring goals, setting something up for his teammates or making a good defensive play."

27

MARTIN
ST. LOUIS

RW, LIGHTNING

By Bruins G TIM THOMAS: "There are certain people who have the unique characteristic that they want to be the hero, they want to be the guy who scores the goal, they want the huge assist. Martin has that intangible."

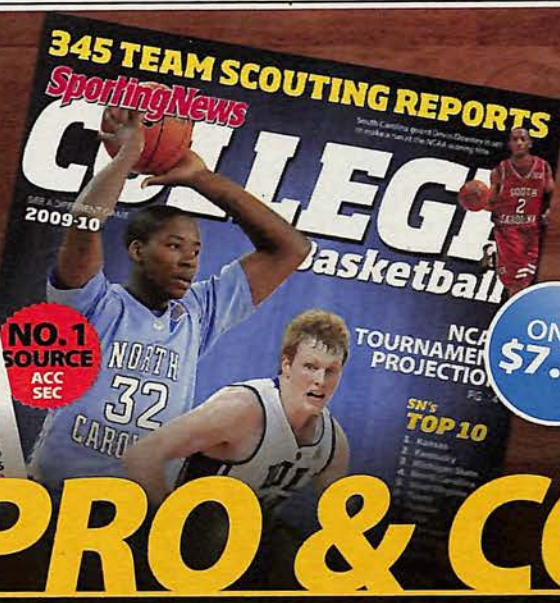
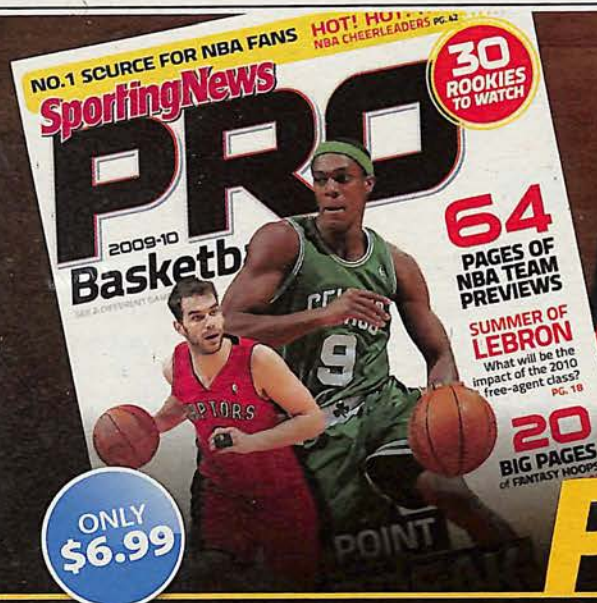
29

HENRIK
LUNDQVIST

G, RANGERS

By Rangers C BRANDON DUBINSKY: "He's one of those goalies who comes up with big saves at key times. You can always count on him if you make mistakes. Sometimes we count on him a little bit too much and he saves our bacon. He's just really calm and collected."

HEATLEY: JEFF GROSS / GETTY IMAGES

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30 JEFF CARTER

C, FLYERS

○ **Flyers LW**
SIMON GAGNE: "It's very scary when you see Jeff, at 6-4, 6-5, skating down the middle at full speed with the shot he has. I'm sure he scares a lot of goalies in this league. He just took that step—not last year but in the semifinals against Pittsburgh in the playoffs. You could see he wanted to take a bigger role, with bigger minutes, and be a guy who can make a difference."

31 MARC SAVARD

C, BRUINS

○ **Bruins RW**
BLAKE WHEELER: "He's one of the more gifted playmakers in the league. He puts the puck on everyone's stick at any given moment. He's intense on the puck out there; you'd be surprised how tough he is to knock off the puck."

33 DION PHANEUF

D, FLAMES

○ **Former All-Star D** **DAVE LANGEVIN:** "For a team to be successful, you have to have the steady defenseman with character, and that's what he is. He's the kind of guy who plays tough all the time, whether at home or on the road. He plays hard every shift. He sticks up for his teammates, is a go-to guy, is someone players look to for leadership."

34 MARIAN GABORIK

RW, RANGERS

○ **Hall of Famer** **JACQUES LEMAIRE,** Gaborik's former coach: "Every time he is on the ice, you have to watch him because of his speed and his ability to score goals. He's a great offensive player. There's no doubt."

35 ALEXANDER SEMIN

LW, CAPITALS

○ **Penguins G** **MARC-ANDRE FLEURY:** "He's got a good shot. He can shoot very quickly and accurately. He's someone you always have to be aware of."

36 DANIEL SEDIN

LW, CANUCKS

○ **Maple Leafs D** **FRANCOIS BEAUCHEMIN:** "I still don't separate Daniel and Henrik (Sedin). I still don't know which one is who. They're both really good players, obviously, and they complement each other out there. They know where they are on the ice; it's tough when you play against them. You want to be as close as you can to them and not give them time to make plays."

37 JAY BOUWMEESTER

D, FLAMES

○ **PETER DEBOER,** Bouwmeester's former coach: "His value for us in our division—he played every night, every shift against Lecavalier and St. Louis in Tampa, against Eric Staal, Kovalchuk, against Ovechkin. And it's hard to put a price or a value on that. Those are tough guys to handle. And I believe there are only five or six defensemen in the world that consistently handle those guys every night, and he's one of them."

38 STEVE MASON

G, BLUE JACKETS

○ **Blue Jackets G.M.** **SCOTT HOWSON:** "Bad goals rarely affect him—he just moves on. He's technically sound, but he's also very big and efficient. His hockey sense is good. His reading of the play is exceptional—he has a good understanding of the game."

32 SHEA WEBER

D, PREDATORS

○ **Predators coach** **BARRY TROTZ:** "He's got that rare combination of skill, power and a physical element that not very many defensemen have in the league. He's an improving player. He can dominate you with physical force, he can dominate you with his shot and he can score from anywhere on the ice."

5 WORDS TO DESCRIBE SHEA WEBER'S 103.4-MPH SLAP SHOT

"Rocket" — **Red Wings LW Kirk Maltby**
"Heavy" — **Maple Leafs D Francois Beauchemin**
"Overpowering" — **Predators coach Barry Trotz**
"Vicious" — **Predators LW Steve Sullivan**
"Cannon" — **Red Wings D Niklas Kronwall**

— Craig Custance

BREAKING DOWN THE TOP 50



39 MIIKKA KIPRUSOFF

G, FLAMES

○ **Former Vezina Trophy winner** **DENIS HERRON:** "He plays angles unbelievably. He moves so fast, also. The game has changed quite a bit now—movement on the ice is very, very important, from one side of the net to the other."

40 NIKLAS BACKSTROM

G, WILD

○ **Devils LW** **BRIAN ROLSTON,** Backstrom's former teammate: "He has a terrific mentality for a goalie. He's a calm individual, real laid-back. He is a competitor, but he can let things go. He's not a goalie who is going to make the miraculous save, (but) he's always in position. He's tough to beat because you have to make an accurate shot."

41 HENRIK SEDIN

C, CANUCKS

○ **JAY FEASTER,** former Lightning G.M.: "Henrik has great vision and hands. He sees the ice incredibly well and finds the open man—especially his brother—as well as anyone in the game."

42 ANDREI MARKOV

D, CANADIENS

○ **Islanders D** **MARK STREIT:** "He's very strong on the power play. He can set up and quarterback it. His shot, his skating, his passing are all really good. He's just a very complete defenseman."

43 MARTIN HAVLAT

RW, WILD

○ **Wild G.M.** **CHUCK FLETCHER:** "He is a natural goal scorer and playmaker. The way he can lean on defenders down low or win a one-on-one battle on the wall or just outskill you is dynamic."

44 BRIAN RAFALSKI

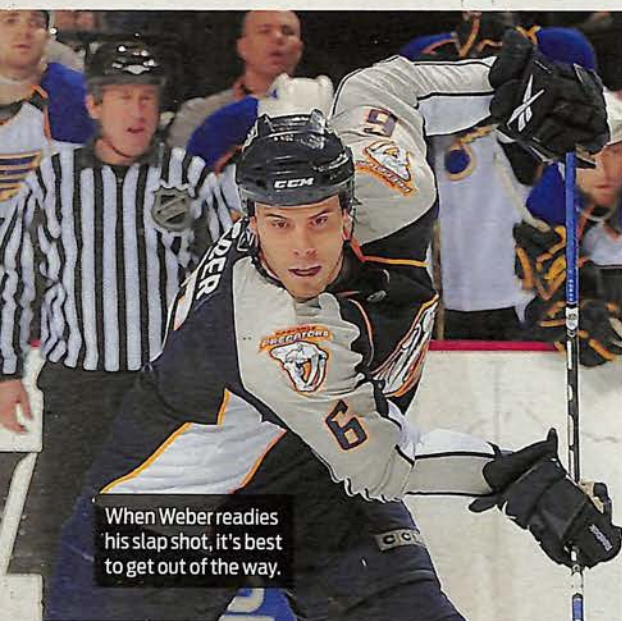
D, RED WINGS

○ **Red Wings D** **NICKLAS LIDSTROM:** "He sees the ice real well. He's a smart player. He knows when to get rid of the puck or make that pass. And he's a good skater. He can go back and get pucks and has a good first outlet pass. Just a really, good, solid defenseman that can play both ends of the ice."

45 TIM THOMAS

G, BRUINS

○ **Maple Leafs C** **PHIL KESSEL,** Thomas' former teammate: "The thing about Timmy is he's the most competitive goalie out there. If a guy has an empty net, he's going to be the one who is going to dive in there and throw a stick at it."



When Weber readies his slap shot, it's best to get out of the way.

THE NHL'S 50 BEST PLAYERS

By country of birth



By position



46 PAUL STASTNY

C, AVALANCHE

○ Hall of Famer and former Avalanche assistant G.M. **MICHEL GOULET**: "He can make a play out of nowhere. He can make a pass out of nowhere, through two or three people, and all of a sudden it's in the net. His passing is definitely his best asset, but he's a guy who dedicated himself to both sides of the ice."

47 BRENDEN MORROW

LW, STARS

○ Stars G **MARTY TURCO**: "Maybe he doesn't have the best shot and isn't the fastest skater, but there's nobody who works harder, cares more and plays the game the way it's meant to be played."

48 CHRIS OSGOOD

G, RED WINGS

○ Former All-Star defenseman and Blackhawks scout **STEVE SMITH**: "He plays very well under pressure. He's done it for an awful long time. With a big game on the line, he's been a guy who has stood up and answered the bell game in and game out. He's a winner."

49 CAM WARD

G, HURRICANES

○ Penguins coach **DAN BYLSMA**: "He's a scary goalie because he can win a game. You know you're facing a goalie that could possibly be the best player on the ice that night. He's a real disciplined goalie, a real in-control goalie. It can feel like no matter how many pucks you put at him, there seems to be a wall there."



Cam Ward

HOW A ROOKIE HELPED US WIN THE STANLEY CUP



By **PETER LAVIOLETTE**, former Hurricanes coach

At the start of the 2006 playoffs, we were between a rock and a hard place. We were down, 2-0, to Montreal on our home ice after a really successful regular season. The decision to start Cam Ward in Game 3 was a tough one. Martin Gerber had played so well for us all season, but we just hadn't had the consistent goaltending we needed in the playoffs.

Cam came in when we were down quite a few in the second game. He came off the bench, and we rallied to tie it. He played well enough to put us back in the game, and we decided to go with him in Game 3. It was clearly his performance that kept him in at that point.

He stole the show in Games 3 and 4 in Montreal. We won four straight with him in there. He earned that position. He got an opportunity and ended up keeping it on the way to a Stanley Cup and Conn Smythe Trophy.

(Cam) had a great disposition about him. He handles pressure very well. He doesn't get too high or too low. He rolled with it.

— As told to Craig Custance

50 DUNCAN KEITH

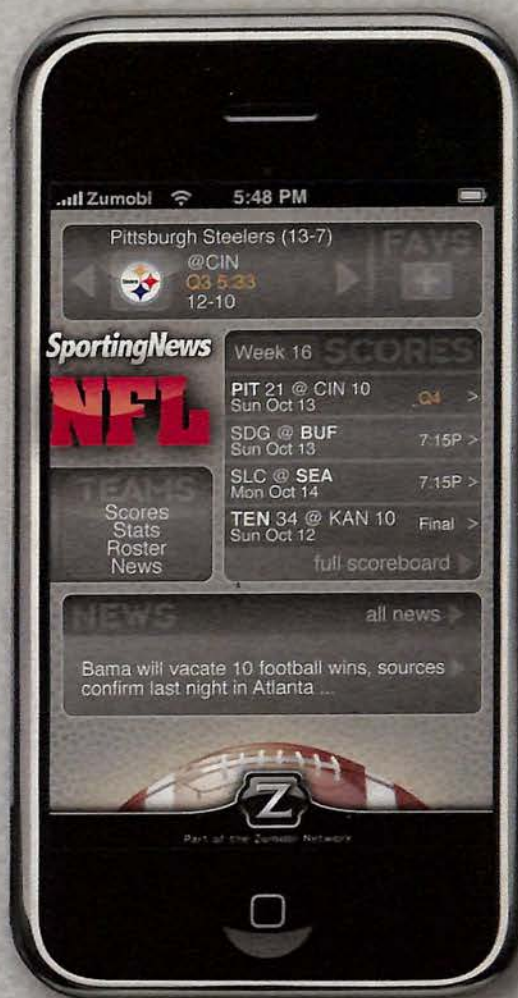
D, BLACKHAWKS

○ Former NHL defenseman and Blackhawks director of player personnel **MARC BERGEVIN**: "He's an elite skater. He's fast and quick. He's a top-notch penalty killer, especially when the puck is down low. He's going to get better; he's going to get stronger. He's in the gym; he takes the job seriously. The culture in Chicago has changed in the last five years, and that's because of guys like him."

Contributing: James Boswell, Matt Crossman, Ryan Fagan

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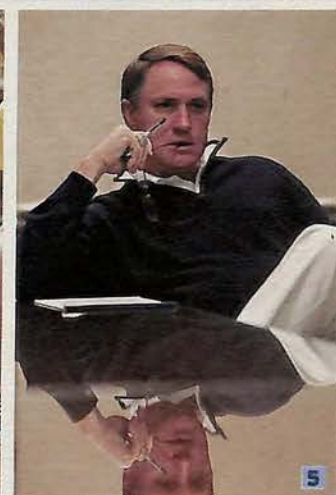
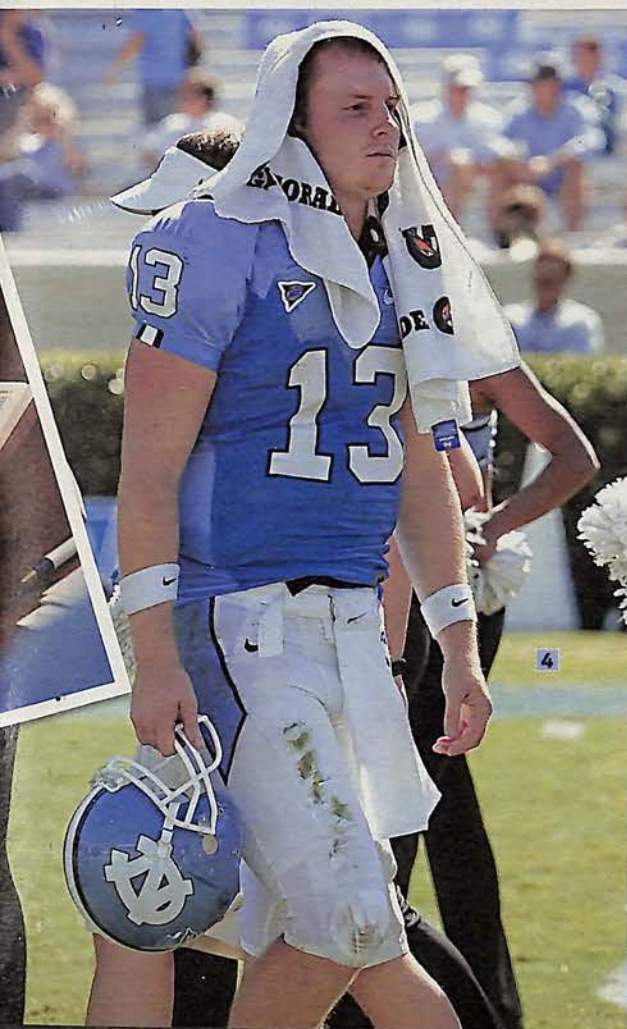
RUNNING WITH THE HEELS



FORMER NFL AND MIAMI HURRICANES COACH BUTCH DAVIS IS TRYING TO MAKE FOOTBALL MATTER IN CHAPEL HILL. *SPORTING NEWS* SPENT A WEEK WITH DAVIS AND THE NORTH CAROLINA FOOTBALL TEAM AS THEY PREPARED FOR WHAT TURNED OUT TO BE A DEFLATING ACC HOME OPENER AGAINST VIRGINIA.

Photos by Bob Leverone/SN





1. Team chaplain Mike Echstenkamper (front) leads the coaches' bible study each Monday morning. Coach Butch Davis, who was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in 2007 but has made a full recovery, makes sure his staff and players have time to practice their faith regularly.

2. Senior defensive back Melvin Williams was one of three Tar Heels who entertained the kids at the Chapel Hill YMCA on Monday afternoon. He and junior defensive back Da'Norris Searcy took turns playing two-square with

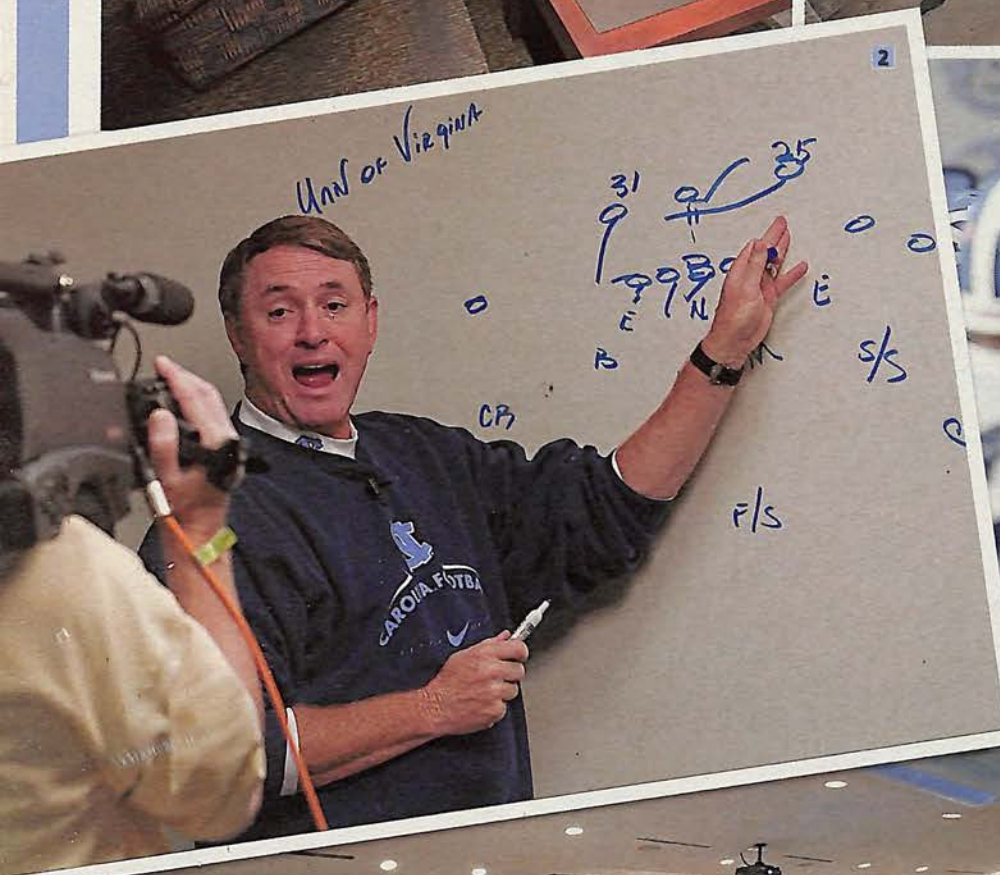
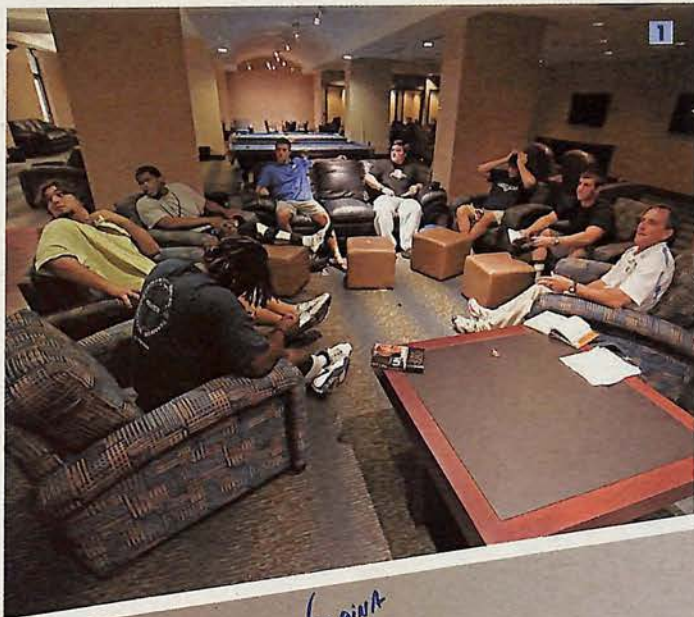
all comers, while freshman defensive lineman Donte Paige-Moss hit the soccer field.

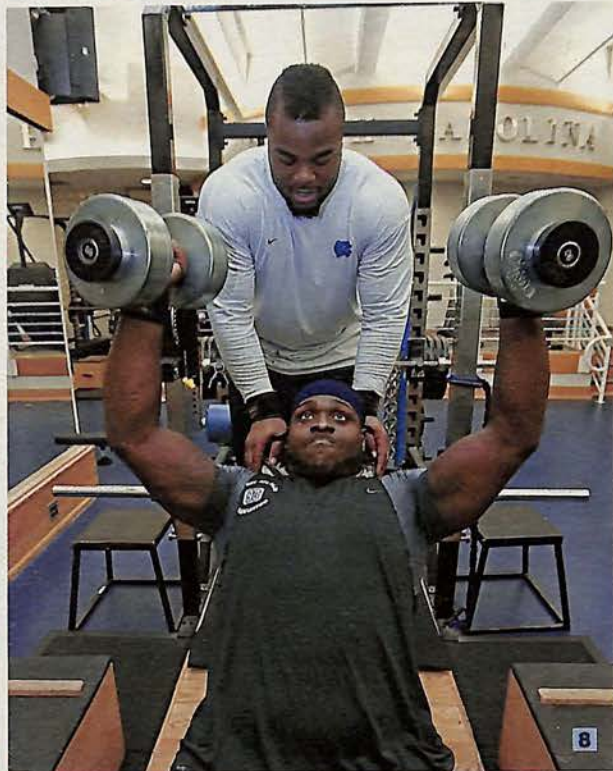
3. On Saturday, excitement ran high when UNC's mascot, Rameses, and the cheerleaders led the team on the Old Well Walk to Kenan Memorial Stadium, where 57,500 fans filled the 60,000-seat facility.

4. The mood was somber for quarterback T.J. Yates and the Tar Heels by the end of a 16-3 loss to previously

winless Virginia. North Carolina, which rose to No. 22 in the rankings after a 3-0 start in nonconference play, has lost its first two ACC games.

5. Davis was eager to start preparing for Georgia Southern when he watched the game film of the Virginia loss by himself Sunday morning. The loss to the Cavaliers was a step back for a program that had been on the rise. Davis took over a 3-9 team after the 2006 season and improved it to 4-8 in 2007 and 8-5 last season.





MONDAY

1. Echstenkamper leads a weekly study of former NFL coach Tony Dungy's motivational book *Quiet Strength* in the players' lounge. The Tar Heels discuss the book and how the ideas in it relate to situations in their own lives.

TUESDAY

2. Several times a week, Davis allows fans to go inside the North Carolina playbook when he tapes a strategy breakdown for posting on ButchDavis.com.

3. After a full team meeting, the Tar Heels broke up into position groups to discuss how to attack Virginia. The special teams session involves the most players, so this group remained in the main meeting room. At the time, no one present suspected they might be preparing for a game that included 17 punts.

4. The Tar Heels get their exercise before practice even begins. A quarter-mile trek from the stadium locker room to the practice field started with a march up the Kenan Memorial steps by offensive lineman Greg Elleby and his teammates. Tuesday's practice, performed in

full pads, is the toughest one of the week.

5. After the previous week's 24-7 loss to Georgia Tech, defensive graduate assistant James Bettcher pointed out assignments to some of the players.

WEDNESDAY

6. For Mark "Polar Bear" Knowles, painting the end zone at Kenan Memorial goes something like this: Outline the letters in white on Tuesday; put down Carolina blue in the middle on Wednesday; add a second coat of white on Thursday; hope the Tar Heels get over the goal line on Saturday. That last one didn't work out against Virginia.

7. It's not clear what measuring the weight of projectiles with physics lab partner Sarah Townsend has to do with sophomore center Cam Holland's career goal of becoming a pharmacist (if the NFL doesn't work out, that is), but it doesn't look easy.

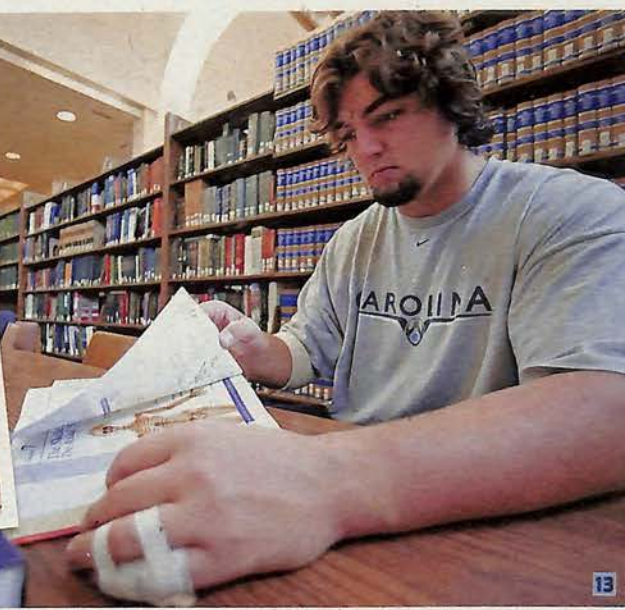
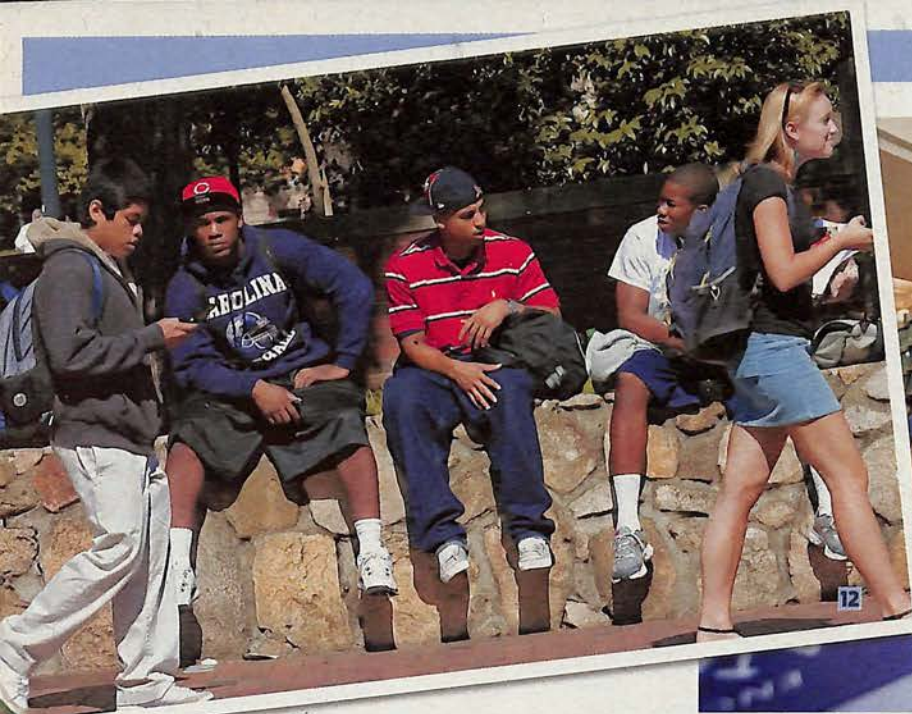
8. Senior defensive tackle Cam Thomas hit the barbells while being spotted by senior defensive tackle Aleric Mullins just after

the team had gotten a lecture from strength and conditioning coordinator Jeff Connors. Connors used the example of USC running back Stafon Johnson, who suffered a crushed larynx when a weight bar fell on his throat, to remind the Tar Heels about safety while lifting and of the need for an attentive spotter.

9. Freshman defensive back Gene Robinson worked on his hands with a tetherball-like contraption while warming up for practice. DBs and receivers throw the ball around the pole hard and then try to catch it.

10. Coming off a 26-yard performance against Georgia Tech, leading rusher Shaun Draughn (20) was getting personal instruction from Davis, who takes a hands-on and hands-together approach in practice. Davis is relentlessly positive and is usually clapping and pushing the pace of drills when he's not talking to players one-on-one.

11. Davis' live weekly radio show is held at the Top of the Hill Restaurant and Brewery in Chapel Hill. About 40 or 50 fans show up to ask him questions.



THURSDAY

12. Welcome to The Pit, a central location on the UNC campus where athletes—in this case freshmen—regularly gather to socialize while sitting on a stone wall. (From left) Linebacker Kevin Reddick, Robinson and receiver Erik Highsmith enjoyed a beautiful early fall day.

FRIDAY

13. Senior offensive tackle Kyle Jolly got in a little studying at the library before his Friday ritual of hitting the hot tub and water stretching.

14. Later, Jolly (far right) joined (from left) junior offensive lineman Alan Pelc, senior linebacker Kennedy Tinsley, freshman offensive lineman Brennan Williams and Paige-Moss on a visit to North Carolina Children's Hospital in Chapel Hill. They made sure 3-year-old Conner Stell wasn't a Duke fan before they handed over some autographed posters.

15. Equipment manager Brock Bandur gives the helmets a thorough cleaning the day before each game. After he gets the Carolina blue to shine, decals are replaced where needed.

SATURDAY

16. There was no indication of the letdown that was about to come when the Heels gathered in the end zone for some pregame motivation about 40 minutes before kickoff.

17. Davis entered the pregame handshake 0-2 at UNC against Virginia's Al Groh.

18. Senior end E.J. Wilson and the North Carolina defense held Virginia to 254 total yards, but the UNC offense mustered only 174 yards and nine first downs.

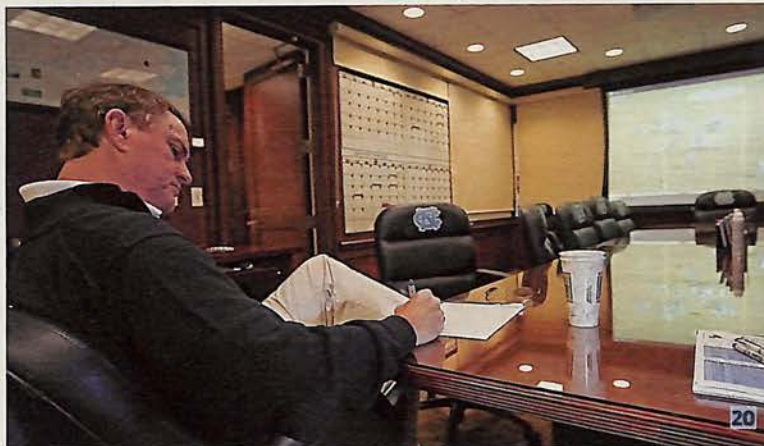
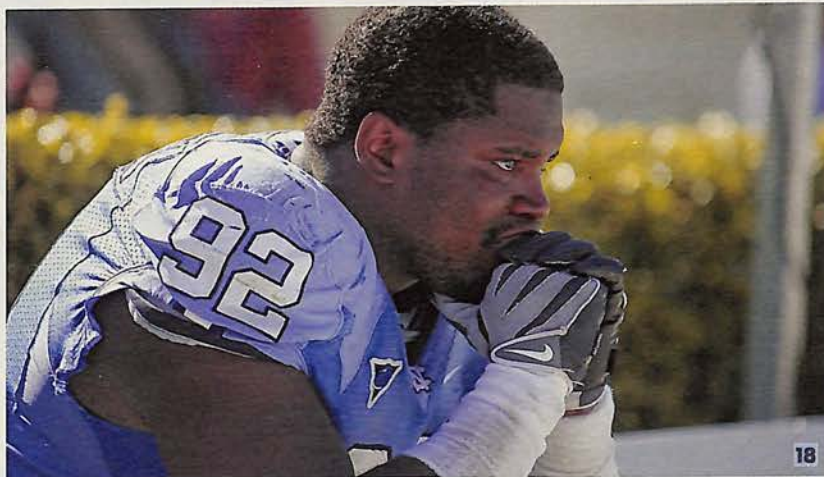
19. The weather was nice, so when the game went south, the home fans had to find other ways to entertain themselves. You wouldn't know the Tar Heels were losing by looking at the Tar Pit student section.

SUNDAY

20. Davis watches film and grades plays for about two hours on Sunday mornings. After that, it's back home to pick up the family for breakfast and a trip to church as a new week begins.



ALL-ACCESS: NORTH CAROLINA FOOTBALL



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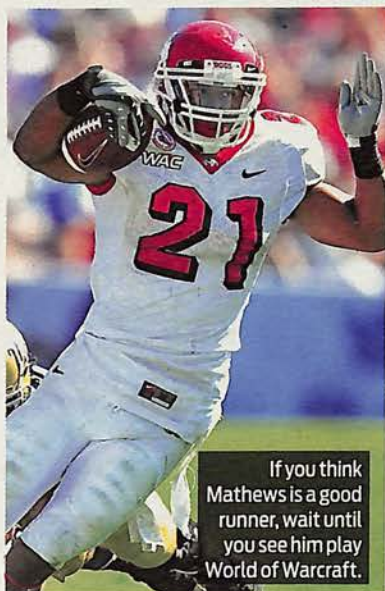
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Introducing ...

Ryan Mathews,
Fresno State running back



If you think Mathews is a good runner, wait until you see him play World of Warcraft.

Bulldogs junior Ryan Mathews led the nation in rushing after four weeks with 592 yards, including 234 he racked up in a 19-carry, three-TD performance against Boise State on September 18.

Mathews rushed for 866 yards as a freshman and 606 as a sophomore, but neither was a full season because of injuries. Now that he's healthy, you'll be hearing plenty about Mathews, who ...

... was a star quarterback in high school.

"The quarterback here has got to do a lot of stuff and read defense," he says. "My passing in high school wasn't all that good. Playing quarterback—I wasn't looking at that in college."

... is a bulldozer at 5-11, 220 pounds.

"We've always felt Mathews is an outstanding back," Boise State coach Chris Petersen says. "Against us, it was a lot of him just being stronger than us. Combine that with his speed and you have one of the top running backs in the country."

... will have more monster games.

The difficult portion of the Bulldogs' schedule is behind them, with Wisconsin, Boise State and Cincinnati in the rearview mirror. After going to Hawaii (102nd in rushing defense), Fresno State has San Jose State (118th) on October 17, followed by New Mexico State (73rd) and Utah State (110th).

... also excels at another pastime—an online role-playing game called World of Warcraft.

"I've been playing it since I was a senior in high school," he says. "I don't think a lot of people know that, maybe just my mom and my brother. I keep it on the down-low."

—Derek Samson

4 reasons we love to watch Cal's No. 4

By Dave Curtis
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California's Jahvid Best remembers watching Reggie Bush at USC and finding his running back role model.

"I just loved how he ran," Best says. "He looked unstoppable."

Through the first month of the season, Best drew similar descriptions. He sprinted into contention for the Heisman Trophy after a five-TD day at Minnesota on September 19 but had mediocre games in consecutive blowout losses to Oregon and USC. With the toughest competition behind him, though, there are four reasons he will re-emerge as the nation's best back:

1. VISION. Cal coach Jeff Tedford raves about how well Best sees the field, and Best's first touchdown against the Gophers provides evidence. The play called for him to run right. But as he reached his linemen, he juke left past two overpursuing linebackers and raced toward the end zone,

where he hurdled a defender at the goal line.

"You think he's going one way," Cal linebacker Mike Mohamed says, "then he cuts back and breaks your ankles."

2. SPEED. A California state champion sprinter in high school, Best returned kicks and played the gunner role on the kick coverage team as a Cal freshman in 2007. Last season, he racked up seven runs of 60 yards or more.

And his speed continues to haunt defenders charged with chasing him around the field.

"He's ridiculous," USC linebacker Chris Galippo says. "He's so fast. He's one of those guys who can change direction without losing speed. ... Our game plan was built around stopping him."

3. STRENGTH. Since his freshman year, Best has added about 12 pounds of muscle, and he gained much of that muscle in his legs, through an offseason workout he calls "Hometown Hill." The session features a series of 70-yard sprints up Georgia

Street in Vallejo, Calif. Sometimes, Best says, he races passing cars. And the additional power is paying off this season.

"When the contact would come, I'd get maybe 1, or a half-yard," Best says. "This year, I can get through the contact or carry the pile for about 3 yards."

4. VERSATILITY. Best serves as the offense's engine—coordinator Andy Ludwig feeds him more than half the carries in close games. But Best can block, too.

"He's a lot stronger than you think he is," Galippo says. "He's not just a speed guy, a guy that you can get physical with. He's strong, and he runs hard."

If that weren't enough, Best also is one of the Bears' most reliable receivers.

"We're really asking him to do it all," Ludwig says, "and he's doing a pretty good job."



Best opened the season with three straight 100-yard games.

The Legends' throwback picks

SN asked five coaching greats who vote each week in the Legends Poll: Which not-so-long-ago national champion is closest to returning to power—Miami, Michigan, Nebraska, Notre Dame or Tennessee?



R.C. Slocum
Texas A&M, 1989-2002

"Miami. Winning national championships is all about players, and of the schools mentioned, Miami has the best chance to recruit top players. They have a very attractive location for college kids—South Beach—and a history of great teams and great players."



Vince Dooley
Georgia, 1964-88

"I would say Nebraska. I believe the coach (Bo Pelini) has the program on more solid grounds of consistency at this time."



John Cooper
Ohio State, 1988-2000

"Notre Dame will be in the running for the national championship before long. They are recruiting some of the better players nationally, and they have a great schedule. They are playing much better so far this year, so look out for Notre Dame in the future."



Bill Mallory
Indiana, 1984-96

"I'd give Michigan the edge. (Rich) Rodriguez has a quarterback in there who can run his offense."



Frank Broyles
Arkansas, 1958-76

"I'd say Tennessee because of a schedule advantage."
—Derek Samson

For much more from the Legends—including blogs, Sporting News Radio audio clips and your chance to ask a Hall of Fame coach a question—go to legendschannel.com.

An athlete is an athlete, whether he's on the hardwood or the field

By Matt Hayes
mhayes@sportingnews.com

Tony Gonzalez may be the best tight end to ever play in the NFL. Antonio Gates has been to the Pro Bowl. Julius Peppers was once the most dominant pass rusher in the game.

And all three were college basketball stars.

Some current college football players have made the same transition:

GREG PAULUS, QB, Syracuse

Then: Only Bobby Hurley and Jason Williams had more assists as Duke freshmen than Paulus, who finished his four-year Blue Devils career with 468.

Now: His completion rate—64.4 percent—would be impressive for an experienced senior, much less a guy who hadn't read a defense or taken a hit since his high school days, but he has thrown more interceptions (nine) than touchdowns (eight).

Syracuse offensive coordinator Rob Spence says: "Being a point guard for Duke, at that high level of competition, I don't think there's any doubt it helped his transition of dealing with pressure with this sport. He's a leader. He likes the game in his hands."



Paulus has been as comfortable running the offense at Syracuse as he was at Duke.

KELVIN GRADY, WR, Michigan

Then: A point guard for the Wolverines as a sophomore last season, Grady played double-digit minutes only twice in the final 12 games of 2008-09, and he was set to transfer before brother Kevin, a tailback on the football team, talked him into switching sports.

Now: It took two weeks for Grady to move from fourth on the depth chart at the slot position to running with the first team. He caught eight passes in the first five games.

Michigan coach Rich Rodriguez says: "Kelvin is very coachable, and with players making a transition from one sport to another, that's a big key. The quick change-of-direction skills in basketball translate somewhat to the wide receiver position."

JIMMY GRAHAM, TE, Miami

Then: Graham wasn't much of a scorer during his four-year career as a forward for the Hurricanes (he averaged 4.2 points), but he ranks eighth in Miami history with 104 career blocks.

Now: At 6-8, 260, he's an imposing target in Miami's pro-style offense, and he can outrun most linebackers. The biggest surprise: a tenacious attitude about blocking. He has two catches—both TDs—for 32 yards this season.

Miami tight ends coach Joe Pannunzio says: "I watched him play basketball, and of course you think to yourself, *I wonder if he'd be interested in football.* It's some of the same skill set in many ways."

FENDI ONOBUN, TE, Houston

Then: In four years at Arizona, he never really fit into the team's philosophy. A 'tweener of sorts, he averaged 1.8 points in 81 games.

Now: The Cougars rarely use tight ends in their spread offense, and when they do, it's usually in goal-line or short-yardage sets. At 6-6, 250, Onobun has an NFL body, but he won't get on the field much until he learns the position.

Houston tight ends coach Tony Levine says: "In our first position meeting, I said, 'Fendi, tight end is an easy position to learn because you're always on the line of scrimmage.' He says to me, 'What's a line of scrimmage?' He has made remarkable progress since he has been here."



1 Those cute and fuzzy BCS busters still can't figure out that the road to a big-boy bowl goes through the dirty, nasty road of conference play.

2 It's only fair, Florida State fans: Bobby Bowden built your program. Might as well give him the latitude to tear it down, too.

3 As much as I hate to say it, the events at Oklahoma this fall—multiple injuries and losses—will convince more underclassmen to head to the NFL.

4 I'm not buying USC yet: The Trojans haven't played against a multiple or dynamic offense, and USC can't throw the ball with consistency.

5 While Oregon debates reinstating LeGarrette Blount, let's remember that Blount not only punched a Boise State player, he also hit a teammate and would've gone into the stands to fight a few fans were it not for some Oregon administrators.

6 Cincinnati vs. Ohio State on a neutral field: I'm taking the Bearcats.

7 Nice-guy Louisville coach Steve Kragthorpe has lost his team; why wait until the end of the season to let someone else try?

8 With Steve Sarkisian's instant success at Washington, Tyrone Willingham's coaching reputation is a tattered mess.

9 At this point, the first look for every game-winning or game-tying 2-point conversion is the Statue of Liberty.

10 New coach, same ugly week-to-week inconsistencies at Clemson.

Matt Hayes covers college football for Sporting News. E-mail him at mhayes@sportingnews.com.

Add another SEC favorite to the list

LSU has put itself in the conference title hunt, by hook or by crook. "People bemoan style points, and that's fine ... but the most important characteristic of a team is to find a way to win," coach Les Miles says.

The undefeated Tigers face the SEC favorites in the coming weeks—Florida on October 10 and Alabama on November 7—and there are a few reasons not to dismiss this scrappy LSU squad:

1. The Tigers have a knack for making big plays at the most opportune times.

"Our football team, if you turn your back, will beat you up and steal your victory," Miles says.

2. They have a swagger in Baton Rouge. "We definitely don't lack confidence," cornerback Patrick Peterson says. "We play fast, and everybody gets to the ball."

3. LSU controls the clock. "What makes us dangerous is the way we can run the ball, the way we can grind and grind and grind," tailback Charles Scott says. "And then we'll throw it past you."

— Ryan Fagan



Miles (second from right) and his Tigers believe they can keep stealing wins.

Singing the praises of Carroll

If NFL players had it to do over again, many would play for USC's coach

Top high school football recruits aren't the only ones lining up to play for Pete Carroll at USC.

Sporting News asked 43 NFL players which college coach they'd most like to play for—other than the one they did—and more than a quarter picked the former Jets and Patriots coach.

PETE CARROLL, USC

→ 12 votes

○ **Broncos CB Champ Bailey** says: "I don't like coaches that are uptight all the time."

○ **Bengals SS Roy Williams** says: "Man, they get to have fun. It looks like it's a big ol' party on the football field."

○ **Vikings DE Jared Allen** says: "I keep it on the West Coast because I'm a West Coast type of guy. That'd be pretty cool. He seems like he has fun. It seems like he

really enjoys coaching, and his players enjoy playing for him, with practical jokes and stuff like that. It seems like our personalities would mesh well together."

○ **Bills FS Donte Whitner** says: "It seems like the guys that come under him are ready to play in the National Football League. He runs everything. He gives his guys a lot of freedom, just as pro coaches do, so when you make that transition to the next level you are prepared and you know what to do with the free time that you have. (Ohio State's Jim) Tressel is the same way."



His teams run the spread offense, but that didn't keep Meyer from getting a vote from an NFL QB.

URBAN MEYER, Florida

→ 8 votes

○ **Bengals QB Carson Palmer** says: "If I went there, they'd have to change a little bit because I'm not going to be able to do the things (Tim) Tebow can do."

○ **Jets FS Kerry Rhodes** says: "He's such a fiery guy and such a competitor. You like to play for those types of guys. He kind of reminds me of (Arkansas' Bobby) Petrino, the way they both seem to demand a lot of you, but at the end of the day, they want what's best for you and the team."

○ **49ers LB Patrick Willis** says: "Those Florida teams are mostly known for offense. That's OK—we could change that."

○ **Titans TE Alge Crumpler** says: "Tim Tebow has a strong affection for his coach, and you don't see a lot of that. They seem to be very, very close, and I think that says a lot."

MIKE LEACH, Texas Tech

→ 3 votes

○ **Buccaneers QB Byron Leftwich** says: "I believe I'd break every college football record on the planet if I played for that guy. When I

was in college, we threw it, but we handed it off also. Those jokers throw it every play."

RANDY SHANNON, Miami

→ 3 votes

○ **Lions RB Kevin Smith** says: "He's got those boys from the University of Miami poppin'. They're playing at a high level, and it looks like they're having fun. He's got that program turned around—you can see it. They've got their swagger back."

FRANK BEAMER, Virginia Tech

→ 2 votes

○ **Panthers LT Jordan Gross** says: "A lot of times, you get out of college and guys will have some contempt toward their old coaches, especially if they rule you with an iron fist. But the guys here say he's great to play for—on and off the field."

LANE KIFFIN, Tennessee

→ 2 votes

○ **Broncos WR Brandon Stokley** says: "I just like his attitude. He knew he had to stir things

up to kind of bring that attention back to Tennessee, and that's what he did: He put his neck out there."

JOE PATERNO, Penn State

→ 2 votes

○ **Chiefs DE Glenn Dorsey** says: "He has the history, and he has the knowledge of the game. He's been in the game so long, and they've got the tradition thing going on. I think it would be cool to play for him. I'll probably get in trouble for leaving the SEC."

NICK SABAN, Alabama

→ 2 votes

○ **Titans LB Keith Bulluck** says: "I like how he has a no-nonsense attitude, and that is the kind of attitude you have to have in college. I know a lot of players who used to play for him back at Michigan State, and they appreciated the way he was."

STEVE SPURRIER, South Carolina

→ 2 votes

○ **Redskins WR Santana Moss** says: "Spurrier, but when he was with Florida. That's where I wanted to go anyway, to be in that passing attack and see what I would have done with all that wide-open offense. His offense seems like the receiver is always open. Football isn't that hard. The way I ran the ball in college, how I made things happen out of three and four grabs, there's no telling what I could have done with 10 balls a game over there."

ALSO RECEIVING VOTES

- Bobby Bowden, Florida State
- Dennis Erickson, Arizona State
- Chip Kelly, Oregon
- Ken Niumatalolo, Navy
- Bob Stoops, Oklahoma
- Jeff Tedford, California
- Ron Zook, Illinois

— SN's NFL correspondents, Jeff D'Alessio



Pete Carroll

Out with the old, in with a guy you haven't heard of

Even the average college basketball player has to manage the demands of weightlifting, study table, practice, games, economics and Earth science. Imagine trying to juggle all of that—while replacing a legend.

RYAN WRIGHT, PF, Oklahoma ... the new Blake Griffin.

"You can't replace Blake," Sooners coach Jeff Capel says. "He had one of the special years in all of college basketball history."

Unless the Sooners want to play with four men, however, somebody will have to replace Griffin in the lineup.

Eventually it could be freshman Tiny Gallon in that role, but Wright will get his shot. He was a big-time recruit for UCLA but struggled to find an opportunity and transferred.

"The times when he got extended minutes, he played very well," Capel says. "With him being the hard worker that he is, he has the opportunity to step in and do some good things."

BRENDAN MCKILLOP, PG, Davidson ... the new Stephen Curry.

Son of head coach Bob McKillop, Brendan won't be throwing in 30 per night. He figures to become the team's point guard, which was the position Curry played last year as a junior. McKillop performed well on the Wildcats' summer trip to Europe.

ALEX ORIAKHI, C, UConn ... the new Hasheem Thabeet.

A 6-9, 240-pound freshman, Oriakhi brings an entirely different look to the Huskies' frontcourt. He's a physical, pound-the-boards type, not a 7-3 shot stopper.

—Mike DeCourcy

The Futile Four? Improvement will be almost impossible for these teams

By Mike DeCourcy
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Three players departed for professional basketball with years of eligibility unspent. The head coach disappeared into the Mississippi backwoods with time remaining on his contract and an NCAA investigation hovering over his program.

The only thing unchanged regarding the Southern California Trojans is they still spell their name with a capital "S" and a capital "C". Oh, and Dwight Lewis remains with the program.

USC has made three consecutive NCAA Tournaments but, following college basketball's most tumultuous offseason, seems unlikely to make it four. The Trojans plan to give it a try.

"We'll be just as good or better," says center Alex Stepheson, eligible to play after transferring from North Carolina. "A lot of people are doubting us, are down on us. I think we still have a lot of talent, and we have a lot to prove. That's motivating us."

Without forward Taj Gibson, wing DeMar DeRozan and point guard Daniel Hackett, Lewis is

the only returning player who averaged more than seven points. Coach Tim Floyd was accused of paying a recruit's handler and resigned, leading to a rare summer coaching search that identified Kevin O'Neill as his replacement.

There is more talent than it would seem on the surface. Adding Stepheson could be significant. Wing Marcus Johnson is capable of making an impact with DeRozan out of the way. Wing Marcus Simmons has been in the training room more than on the court, but USC hopes he'll be healthier this year, and rugged Leonard Washington could be a solid Pac-10 power forward once he regains his eligibility to compete.

But everything has to go right, and that hasn't been the trend at USC lately.

"Our guys have worked extremely hard," O'Neill says. "I really like their work ethic. I like them as people. If we can just avoid the injury bug, we can be competitive."

"One of our keys will be how guys adjust to a bigger spotlight. Every one of them, they're all going to be in a bigger spotlight than they've ever been in. Sometimes



Dwight Lewis

that brings out the best in guys. Sometimes that messes with them a little bit."

The Trojans, who were 22-13 last season, will have company as a team trying to avoid a major plunge from 2008-09 to 2009-10:

PROVIDENCE (19-14). The Friars lost five of their top seven players, roughly two-thirds of their production. Coach Keno Davis took over a veteran team last year that was a factor in the Big East, but now he'll attempt to rebuild in the nation's most imposing conference.

MARQUETTE (25-10). Jerel McNeal, Wesley Matthews and Dominic James weren't just the foundation of the Marquette program last season—they were every bit of that for four years. The talent isn't in place yet to navigate such a profound roster change.

MEMPHIS (33-4). What could have been the nation's preseason No. 1 team won't be picked first in Conference USA. The Tigers have talent but, because of injuries and defections, not nearly enough depth. New coach Josh Pastner is hitting it big as a recruiter, so now is the chance for the rest of C-USA to take its shots.

5-on-5 Five players take on five topics

	I'd pay money to spend a day with ...	Toughest place to win in our league	Last movie that made me cry	Most improved part of my game	Best uniforms in basketball
Jamelle McMillan, G, Arizona State	Denzel Washington	USC	Ladder 49	Getting to the paint and creating opportunities	Louisville black—they have a tough look about them.
Chas McFarland, C, Wake Forest	Michael Jordan	Clemson	I've never cried during a movie.	My shooting	UConn
Lazar Hayward, F, Marquette	Michael Jackson	Louisville	Harlem Nights—I cried laughing.	Ability to make my teammates better	UCLA, but ours are very popular with other players.
Dior Lowhorn, F, San Francisco	Megan Fox	Gonzaga	The Pursuit of Happyness	Attacking the basket	Oregon—they're really unique.
Evan Turner, G/F, Ohio State	Michael Jordan	Michigan State	It's never happened.	3-point shot	Duke—I like their colors.



—Jeff D'Alessio

The 49ers are buying what Singletary is selling



Ronnie Lott

The fundamentals of winning never change. If you want to examine the essence of winning, go back and see how Vince Lombardi created disciplines around the fundamentals of the game and disciplines around the elements of toughness. All those roots reside in Mike Singletary—and you're seeing those roots sprouting in the culture of the 49ers.

The 49ers' rise is not surprising to anyone who has met Mike. He is as grounded in fundamentals and toughness as any of the great coaches, from Lombardi to Shula to Parcells.

I've known Mike since 1980, when I met him at the Walter Camp All-American banquet. He is the same principled, magnetic person now that he was then as a senior at Baylor.

San Francisco hasn't had a winning season since 2002 but is 3-1 this year and 8-5 since Mike took over as coach last October. He has taken basically the same players that went 7-16 in the previous year and a half and molded them to embody his characteristics. Perhaps no greater example of Mike's work is tight end Vernon Davis. He came into the league thinking about himself and not about the team, and now he's a captain.

Mike's mission isn't just about winning; it's about helping men maximize their potential on and off the field. People are drawn to him, much like they are to Tony Dungy. Mike will always be fair, always make you a better person and a better player. Not every coach is willing to invest the time to make you a better person.

That's why rookie wideout Michael Crabtree's holdout is even more perplexing. Mike Singletary would

be the best thing to ever happen to Crabtree. God put Mike on this earth to make a difference in men's lives.

On the field, Mike has established the core principles of winning in the 49ers: run the ball, don't beat yourself, be solid on special teams and play good, tough defense.

Peel back the onion of the 49ers and you'll see they have a future Hall of Famer to follow in wideout Isaac Bruce. You'll see playmakers in Davis and running back Frank Gore. On defense, you'll see end Justin Smith making big plays now that he's comfortable in his second season by the Bay. You'll see a young guy like linebacker Patrick Willis playing like a 10-year vet.

Good NFL teams start to become great between Weeks 8 and 12. Their essence becomes more polished, their purpose more defined. We'll know a lot more about the 49ers at that point, but right now they're the team to beat in the NFC West.

Ronnie Lott, a Pro Football Hall of Fame defensive back, is a regular contributor to Sporting News.

My favorite play



By Texans WR Andre Johnson

The Texans call it: Read Route
You know it as: A post or hook route



This is one of my favorite routes, and it's worked well for me through the years. I line up on the right side. We can have two or three receivers to the left with no fullback, or we can have a fullback, a receiver and a tight end. I've drawn this one up with a tight end and a wideout.

When we beat the Titans (34-31) in Week 2, we ran this play for a 72-yard touchdown. The key is the free safety. Matt Schaub and I both read him. When Matt comes to the line, he's looking over the defense and checking the free safety. To make this play work, he and Steve (Slaton),

our running back, have to really sell the run. When the ball is snapped, I have to get off the line. When I do, I go for the middle. If the free safety bites on the run, then I take off down the field on a post route. If he doesn't go for it, I'm running a hook at 18 yards. Not 19 or 20 but 18.

Matt has to read the same thing, and when he sees the safety not bite on the play fake, he knows I'm going to turn, so he has to release the ball before I turn. When I do, it's there. If he sees the safety bite on the run, he knows I'm going deep and he lets it fly.

— As told to John McClain



Mario Manningham



Steve Smith

3 questions with ...

Giants WRs Mario Manningham and Steve Smith

Q: Both of you were in the league's top 10 in receiving yards after three games. Have you answered critics who said the Giants should have traded for a veteran receiver?

MANNINGHAM: We're all going to keep working regardless of what people say. If we do our jobs and keep working together, we'll be fine.

SMITH: It's still early. We can't go crazy, but all the receivers believe in themselves. We make each other better.

Q: How did you go about building chemistry with Eli Manning?

MANNINGHAM: We worked a lot in the offseason. We tried to get better every day. We did what we had to do to click.

SMITH: We always felt good. Even in my rookie year, me and Eli had a good rapport. I think without Plax (Plaxico Burress) and Toom (Amani Toomer), we started jelling a little bit more.

Q: What's the biggest difference between playing wide receiver in college and the NFL?

MANNINGHAM: The speed and reading defenses. When you're in college, you only have two people to read, the safety and the corner. Now you have the safety, the corner, the backside safety and the middle linebacker. You run with your head up. In college, you just ran to get the right depth on the pattern.

SMITH: The way coverages are disguised so well. You really have to make sure you are on the same page with Eli. If you see something different than he sees, mistakes happen. If you see the same thing, you can adjust and make plays.

— Clifton Brown

Four weeks, five things I didn't see coming



Troy Aikman

We've reached the end of the first quarter in the NFL season, a point where things should start coming into focus, yet there are some teams I still can't quite wrap my arms around:

➔ **PATRIOTS (3-1).** They made a big statement by beating the Ravens, who may be the best team in the league. There's a tendency to look at New England and say, "Bill Belichick, Tom Brady, no problem." That's not bad thinking, and I understand it, but there has been more to it than just Brady coming back from a serious knee injury.

There are new faces—such as Leigh Bodden, Derrick Burgess and Shawn Springs—who are still getting acclimated. And I suspect they miss Josh McDaniels, their former offensive coordinator, more than what has been reported. Getting Wes Welker back can only help.

➔ **JETS (3-1).** You just didn't expect this kind of start from a team with a first-year coach and a rookie quarterback. Losing in New Orleans was just a bump in the road.

You have to have players to win, and

Mark Sanchez has made big throws. But I've always believed coaching makes a big difference in this league. And I think Rex Ryan certainly is proving that with his defense. He has those guys playing hard and believing. They got after Brady pretty good in Week 2. They didn't sack him, but they sure banged him around.

➔ **DOLPHINS (1-3).** Last year, they dug their way out of a 2-4 hole to finish 11-5 and win the AFC East. Yet I felt they were still a few key pieces away from validating that record this year.

Losing quarterback Chad Pennington was a big blow as far as leadership, but I know the organization believes in Chad Henne. He played well in his first NFL start, but coming back from 0-3 is simply asking too much.

➔ **TITANS (0-4).** A lot was expected from them after they posted the best regular-season record in the league last season. They have a veteran quarterback in Kerry Collins, arguably the fastest player in the NFL in running back Chris Johnson and a defense that should hold up despite the loss of Albert Haynesworth. But they face a huge uphill battle.

➔ **PANTHERS (0-3).** I have to remind myself that this team went 12-4 and played the Giants for the No. 1 seed in the NFC playoffs late last season. The way the Panthers got knocked out of the playoffs by Arizona and their start this season leaves me scratching my head and doubting there will be a return to postseason play.

Troy Aikman, a Pro Football Hall of Fame quarterback, is a regular contributor to Sporting News and host of the weekly Troy Aikman Show on Sporting News Radio.



This is ... Antwan Odom

Bengals defensive end, explosive sack artist

- **Born:** September 24, 1981 in Mobile, Ala.
- **Height/weight:** 6-5/280
- **Draft:** Second round (No. 57) by the Titans in 2004
- **College:** Alabama
- **Welcome-to-the-NFL moment:** "One day, as a rookie, I got to my locker and found out my clothes weren't there. We later found them in the whirlpool. I just had to wear whatever was dry that was around, workout stuff. I wouldn't do that to someone else. It's just not me."
- **On his 5-sack game against Green Bay in Week 2:** "It's now my most memorable moment in the NFL. We just

studied tape of things we could do to rush the passer, and I just worked hard to apply that on the field."

- **Favorite pass-rush move:** "I try to get a little step before the snap to get me into my speed move. I feel that I'm pretty quick, and my hope is to get a good jump on the offensive lineman."
- **Inspirations:** "When I was younger, some of the guys I liked were Greg Lloyd, Reggie White and Jevon Kearse."
- **Testimonial:** "I really felt like (Week 1's 2-sack game against Denver) was kind of the coming-out thing that Antwan needed. I'm glad for Antwan because he's had to



Odom showed off his improved moves against the Packers—five times.

persevere through some tough things. Now, he's doing the things we expected him to do when we brought him in here (in 2008)." — Bengals coach Marvin Lewis
— Vinnie Iyer

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A scout's 10 best offensive lines

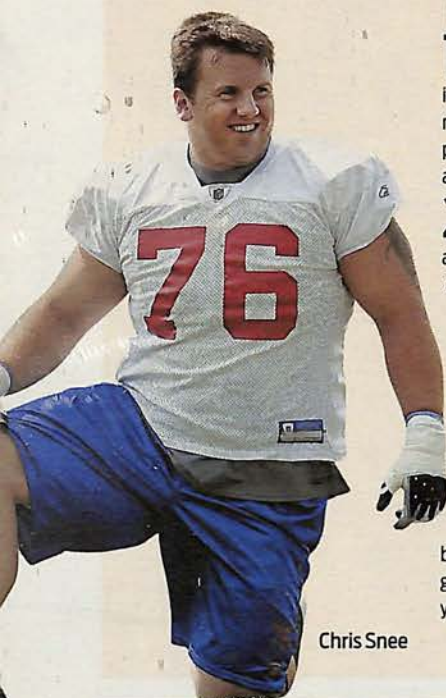
- GIANTS.** Talk about a physical, cohesive group. These guys have started as a unit in 41 of the past 42 games. They don't have any superstars, but Chris Snee has emerged as a top interior player.
- TITANS.** They are physical run blockers who give up sacks grudgingly. Their young bookend tackles, Michael Roos and David Stewart, are approaching their primes and will only get better.
- COWBOYS.** If you like size in your line, you've got to love the Dallas five, one of the league's biggest and most experienced groups. Andre Gurode is a great anchor in the middle.
- DOLPHINS.** This line is athletic and plays with toughness. Jake Long and Vernon Carey set the tone on the edges.
- SAINTS.** This under-the-radar line moves the chains and doesn't give up many sacks (only 17 in 765 pass attempts since the start of the '08 season). They're going to miss Jammal Brown at some point.
- PATRIOTS.** Matt Light and Co. have been together for most of the past five seasons and are a big reason for New England's success. Just ask Tom Brady.
- PANTHERS.** They have several players currently in or still approaching their primes. Jordan Gross has evolved into one of the best edge blockers in the league.
- JETS.** They're strongest at the interior positions, where Alan Faneca and Nick Mangold make life difficult for defenders trying to crash inside.
- BRONCOS.** The interior is undersized but has speed and quickness. Young tackles Ryan Clady and Ryan Harris are above-average athletes.
- FALCONS.** They continue to protect Matt Ryan well, but their running game (No. 2 in the league last year) has been sluggish so far.

3 reasons the Giants' line is No. 1

BY RG CHRIS SNEE

- Smarts.** We're a tough group of guys. And not just physically. Mentally, if there is a sack or a tackle for a loss or a negative play, we're very good at moving past that and basically just losing that play and moving on.
- Durability.** We put in hours in the film room and the weight room, and we have guys who like to work. We definitely have had enough nicks or bumps where we could have easily backed out and not played the game. It's pride—we want to be out there every week, and we don't want to let the other guys down.
- Athletic ability.** We have some guys who can move around a little bit and also some powerful guys. You hear more that the group is better than the individual—we've heard that all before. I definitely think we have a good group, but it's a new year and we haven't yet gotten to the level we were at last year.

— As told to Paul Schwartz



Chris Snee

A scout's 3 worst offensive lines

- Lions.** This is an underachieving group whose best two players, Jeff Backus and Dominic Raiola, are on the backsides of their careers.
- Raiders.** They occasionally flash as run blockers when they don't have to adjust laterally, but they struggle in pass protection against defenders who are quick or athletic.
- Browns.** Joe Thomas could start for any team in the league. Unfortunately, the other linemen are mediocre.

The perfect offensive lineman

An NFL scout picks five attributes that make a great O-lineman, then ranks the best in each area

1. Athletic ability



1. **Ryan Clady, T, Broncos** says: "The whole offensive line is filled with athletic guys, which I think I fit in well with. ... Also, I

played a lot of basketball when I was younger. That probably helped out."

2. **Jason Peters, T, Eagles**

3. **Jordan Gross, T, Panthers**

2. Footwork



1. **Jordan Gross, T, Panthers** says: "I've been fortunate that I had a really technical coach in college.

And now, working with (line coach) Dave Magazu, that's what they emphasized to me. Really, when I leave the huddle to get into my stance, I'm always thinking of where my first step's going to be."

2. **Joe Thomas, T, Browns**

3. **Ryan Clady, T, Broncos**

3. Hand use



1. **Nick Mangold, C, Jets** says: "Your hands will take you where you need to go, and your feet will get you there, too. So I think it's a combination of making sure your hands are in the right place and your feet getting over there, too."

2. **Steve Hutchinson, G, Vikings**

3. **Jordan Gross, T, Panthers**

4. Toughness



1. **Jahri Evans, G, Saints** says: "It's definitely a reputation you want to have. I want my opponent to know it's going to be a four-quarter game. Every play is going to be contact, and every play I'm going to try to dominate you and win my individual battle."

2. **Leonard Davis, G, Cowboys**

3. **Donald Penn, T, Bucs**

5. Awareness/smarts



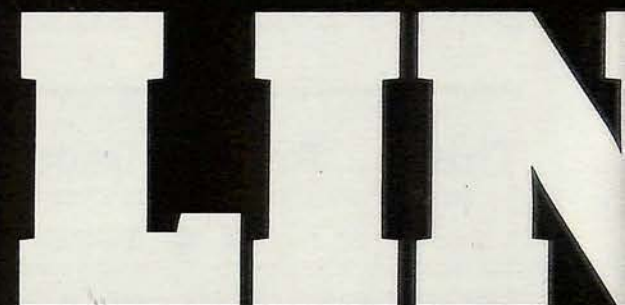
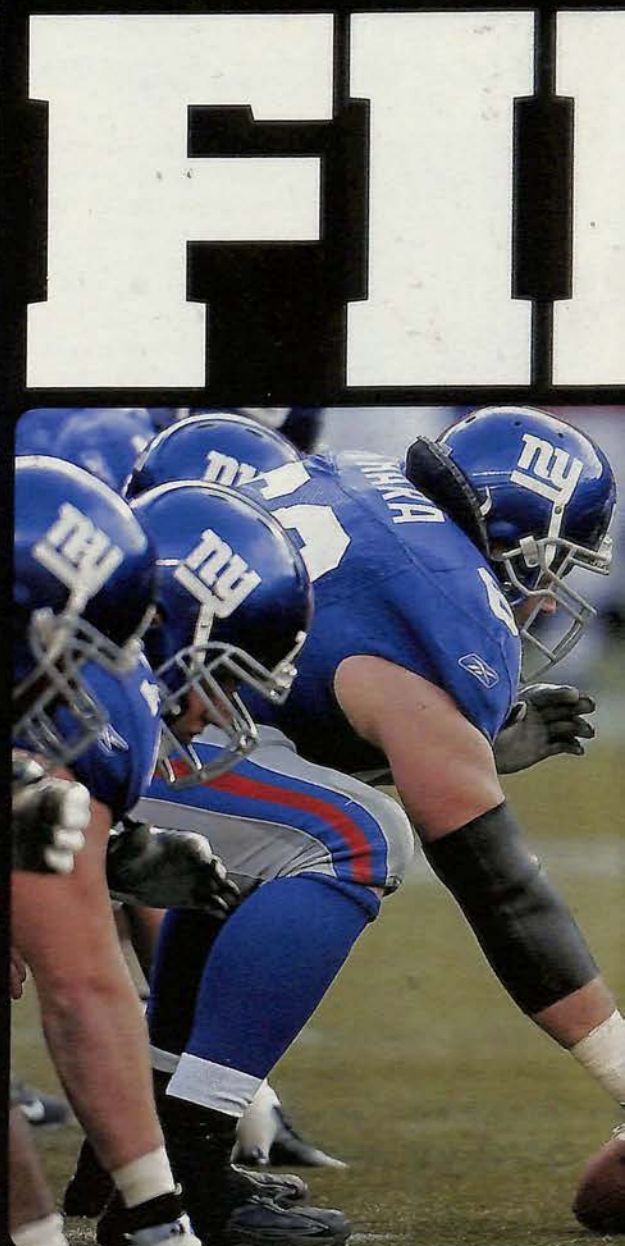
1. **Kevin Mawae, C, Titans** says: "After 16 years, you have played so much and seen virtually everything. So you just have a feel for things that

can happen, like when you see a safety rolling over the top at the last minute and you know where the coverage is taking it. You just have to feel it, and you can't explain it."

2. **Nick Mangold, C, Jets**

3. **Alan Faneca, G, Jets**

— As told to Dennis Dillon



On both sides of the ball, it's still

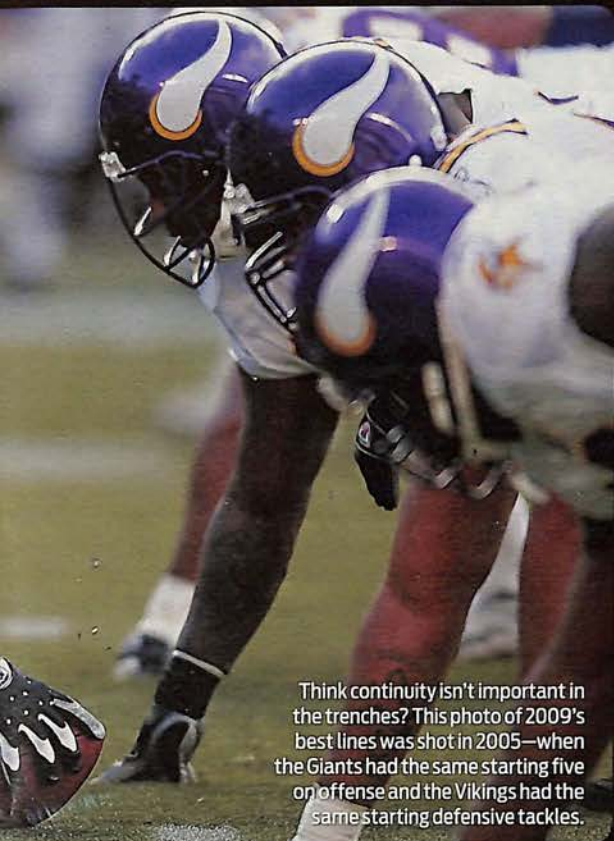
By Dennis Dillon
ddillon@sportingnews.com

Imagine a team with Peyton Manning at quarterback, Adrian Peterson at running back, and Larry Fitzgerald and Andre Johnson at wide receiver. That would

be one supercharged offense, but it would produce more fizzle than sizzle if the line didn't do its job.

"That's where it all starts," says Giants coach Tom

N



Think continuity isn't important in the trenches? This photo of 2009's best lines was shot in 2005—when the Giants had the same starting five on offense and the Vikings had the same starting defensive tackles.

IES

what's up front that matters

Coughlin, whose offensive and defensive lines are among the best in the NFL. "It's been that way with any team I've ever been around that's won. The better you can be up front with your offensive line and your defensive line, the more opportunities you have to

provide yourself with strategic ways in which you can win. If you don't have those ingredients, you will find yourself very limited."

A quarter of the way through the season, *Sporting News* asked NFL scouts to take us inside the trenches.

The perfect defensive lineman

An NFL scout picks five attributes that make a great D-lineman, then ranks the best in each area

1. Body lean



1. **Dwight Freeney, E, Colts** says: "It gives me good leverage and the ability to get through small spaces and create a small surface area to make it harder for the offensive lineman to hit. That's one of the most important qualities."

2. **Jared Allen, E, Vikings**

3. **Julius Peppers, E, Panthers**

2. Footwork



1. **Kevin Williams, T, Vikings** says: "A lot of it is setting up the opponent. You get off the ball—do get-offs, do get-offs, do get-offs—and

then you either take him inside or chop your feet, almost like a basketball player doing a crossover dribble. It takes him out of his rhythm after he's seen you do the same rush move so many times."

2. **Cullen Jenkins, E, Packers**

3. **Albert Haynesworth, T, Redskins**

3. Quick hands



1. **Jared Allen, E, Vikings** says: "Everything starts and ends with your hands. If you have good hands, you're going to have good feet. You can't play with your shoulders in this league; everybody is too athletic for that."

2. **Robert Mathis, E, Colts**

3. **Tommie Harris, T, Bears**

4. Tenacity



1. **Darnell Dockett, T, Cardinals** says: "If you had to work to get where you are at, then you cherish it and you play hard. And then when you're underpaid and you've been rated as one of the top D-linemen for the last two years and you're not even paid in the top 20-something D-linemen, then, yeah, that makes you want to play harder, too."

2. **Tommie Harris, T, Bears**

3. **Julius Peppers, E, Panthers**

5. Instincts



1. **Tommie Harris, T, Bears** says: "You really just have to react in such a short box. It's like being in a telephone booth and playing. So, really, playing the position does amount to nothing but instinct."

2. **Kris Jenkins, T, Jets**

3. **Kelly Gregg, T, Ravens**

—As told to Dennis Dillon

A scout's 10 best defensive lines

1. **VIKINGS.** They have a dominant front with the Williams Wall (defensive tackles Pat and Kevin Williams) and right end Jared Allen. And the fourth guy (left end Ray Edwards) is pretty good, too.

2. **GIANTS.** They have outstanding depth behind the starters. Some of those backups could start for other teams.

3. **RAVENS.** The key there was getting Kelly Gregg back. He's not the prototype nose tackle, but getting him back in the mix was huge for their defense.

4. **STEELERS.** You've got your stout guy (Casey Hampton) in the middle and two guys (Aaron Smith and Brett Keisel) with nonstop motors on the ends.

5. **TITANS.** They haven't really missed a beat with Albert Haynesworth gone. The young guys have

stepped up. Tony Brown is making his own reputation now.

6. **REDSKINS.** Haynesworth, obviously, has made a difference. He raises the level of everyone around him. He's the most dominant defensive lineman in the league.

7. **EAGLES.** They've battled some injuries, but when they're healthy they have some depth and some good young players.

8. **RAIDERS.** Richard Seymour and Greg Ellis have brought some accountability and professionalism.

9. **PATRIOTS.** They miss Seymour, but you're not going to find too many better than Vince Wilfork and Ty Warren.

10. **49ERS.** After a couple years in the 3-4 scheme, they're buying into (coordinator) Greg Manusky's philosophy. Justin Smith has played well.

3 reasons the Vikings' line is No. 1

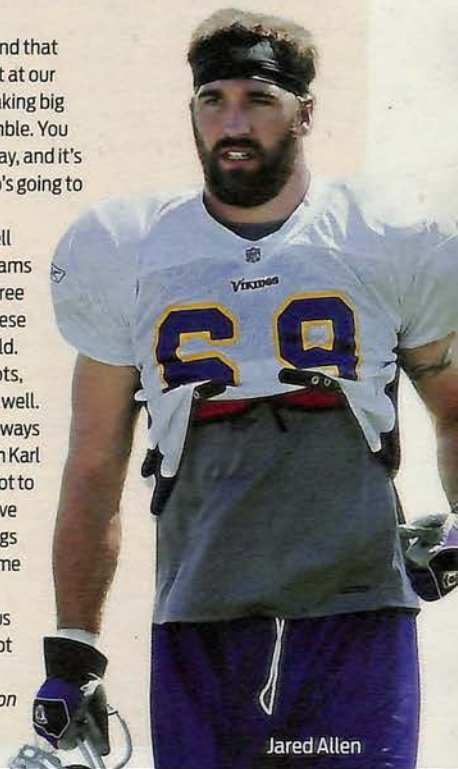
BYE JARED ALLEN

1. **Talent.** We all have that drive and that individual motivation to be the best at our positions. Everybody has a knack for making big plays, whether it's a sack or a forced fumble. You never know who's going to make that play, and it's always a race, a competition, to see who's going to do it first.

2. **Cohesiveness.** We work well together. Pat Williams, Kevin Williams and Ray Edwards have been together three years, and this is my second year with these guys. We all get along, on and off the field. We trust each other to be in the right spots, and we know how to play off each other well.

3. **Coaching.** It's not necessarily always about teaching technique—although Karl Dunbar has great technique—but you've got to know how to manage your players. You have to know how to use them and present things to them because not every player is the same and you can't teach everybody the same. Coach Dunbar does a good job of keeping us all heading in the same direction, but it's not always the same way to get there.

—As told to Dennis Dillon



Jared Allen

A scout's 3 worst defensive lines

1. Lions.

I don't know if they're really that bad, but the young guys haven't really stepped up yet.

2. Rams.

They've invested in some high draft picks on both lines—offense and defense—but they're not there yet. And Adam Carriker is out for the year.

3. Buccaneers.

They have some talent, but they're really struggling right now. Maybe it's the new scheme, maybe it's that they're missing some veteran leadership.

Contributing: Gene Chamberlain, Mike Chappell, Darin Gantt, J.P. Pelzman, Lee Rasizer, Kent Somers, Mike Triplett, Jim Wyatt

3-on-3

Three rookies—New York's Jordan Hill, Golden State's Stephen Curry and Chicago's James Johnson—answer three questions on the eve of their first season



Jordan Hill



Stephen Curry



James Johnson

SN: Which guy are you most looking forward to playing against?

HILL: Kevin Garnett and Amare Stoudemire. Garnett, he's originally from 40 minutes from where I'm from in South Carolina. And Amare, his athleticism is off the charts. Those are definitely two players that I admire and looked up to when I was younger.

CURRY: I can't wait to play in Charlotte. It's not 'til March, but I already have family and friends asking for tickets.

JOHNSON: Definitely Jeff Teague, Atlanta Hawks. He was my teammate at Wake Forest, and he's one of my best friends.

SN: What is your favorite thing about your new city?

HILL: I really haven't had a chance to get out and enjoy New York like I want to. Right now, it's just being around the Knicks family. Everybody gets along. Everybody is helping me, showing me the ropes.

CURRY: I haven't been here too long, but one of my neighbors is Don Nelson. I am within earshot. Maybe after games, he will be watching tape and I will hear him yelling. I just hope he is yelling with joy.

JOHNSON: Chicago is the best—best fans, great city. And they have the deep-dish pizza. I like that, but I have to stay in shape. I can't eat too much of it.

SN: What's the best advice you've heard about preparing for your rookie season?

HILL: We went to this rookie orientation program put on by the NBA. It helped to teach us about what we are going to be going through, whether it's family problems or people coming out of the woodwork trying to ask for things or girls on trips.

CURRY: Just to remember I am a rookie and to go into training camp with the mentality of I am starting from ground zero.

JOHNSON: A lot of the guys have been telling me not to try to do too much too early. It's a long season; I have to get used to that.

— Sean Deveney, Bill Eichenberger

October drama can lead to November trauma

By Sean Deveney

sdeveney@sportingnews.com

Back in late July, Warriors guard Stephen Jackson was getting married in Houston. Among the groomsmen were Warriors teammate Monta Ellis, former Warrior Al Harrington and current teammate Corey Maggette, who noted that, because Jackson's favorite color is red, the wedding party wore red. "I was in one of those funky red outfits," Maggette says. "But that's Stephen Jackson."

At varying times in his career, Jackson has been known as hardheaded, uncoachable and troublesome in the locker room. Since coming to Golden State in a 2007 trade, though, he seemed to become the team leader and a favorite of coach Don Nelson's. Jackson also was at his most productive—he averaged 20-plus points each of the past two seasons and signed a three-year, \$28 million extension last November.

Then? A month after his wedding, Jackson made public his demand to be traded.

But that's Stephen Jackson, never one for the predictable. He is the NBA's only captain who publicly wants to leave the team he leads. He is also not one to hold his tongue, which could make his situation in Golden State one of the league's biggest trouble spots.

There is some logic to Jackson's complaints. Since a thrilling



Jackson isn't one to keep his mouth shut, and that could hurt the Warriors this season.

first-round playoff defeat of the top-seeded Mavericks in 2007, the Warriors have let go well-regarded veterans—Jackson names Harrington, Baron Davis, Jason Richardson and Mickael Pietrus—in order to groom a nucleus of young talent. That new core includes Ellis, guard Anthony Morrow, forward Anthony Randolph, center Andris Biedrins and rookie guard Stephen Curry, all in their early 20s. At 31, Jackson doesn't have time for rebuilding.

"When we beat Dallas, that team had a lot of upside," he

says. "I hoped the team was going to stay the same. But this organization is very unpredictable. ... I am Big-Shot Jack. I don't want to be home in April watching the playoffs on TV anymore, thinking, *I want to be there.*"

The Warriors have tried to accommodate Jackson's desire for a trade, but he has made it difficult to get fair value. He has a lot of money left on his contract, and his public announcements have let opponents know Golden State is bargaining from a position of weakness. The Warriors are getting low-ball offers, and that's unlikely to change because most general managers know Jackson has the potential to make the situation worse.

Jackson says that won't happen and that once the season gets rolling he'll "give 110 percent, in practice and in games," Maggette, one of his closest confidants, agrees. "He is not the kind of guy who is going to loaf or fake an injury or make everyone miserable just to get traded," Maggette says.

Still, the season hasn't started and already there is controversy to overcome. Some Warriors are simply keeping their fingers crossed. "I am sure it will be fine," forward Kellenna Azubuike says. "We've had controversy before. Stephen has been a great teammate. We'll just ride it out, keep our focus. We'll try to block out the drama."

Three more preseason hot spots

❖ **CHICAGO.** Derrick Rose is the point guard, and John Salmons probably will start at shooting guard. That makes veteran Kirk Hinrich a sixth man, a role he reluctantly handled last season. "It doesn't matter to me," Hinrich says. "I know I am going to play the minutes, whether point guard or shooting guard, as a starter or off the bench."



Kirk Hinrich

❖ **UTAH.** The Jazz were not thrilled when power forward Carlos Boozer decided not to opt out of the final year of his contract. After re-signing sixth man Paul Millsap to take over the position, attempts to trade Boozer were fruitless. The Jazz enter the season with an oversize payroll and the potential for hidden agendas.

❖ **PHOENIX.** Power forward Amare Stoudemire was nearly traded last season and on draft night. There have been rumblings about attitude problems around Stoudemire for much of his career, and in August he declared it's 50-50 that he'll remain a Sun all season.

— Sean Deveney

My first Chase



With his win at Michigan, Vickers (right) was able to check a goal off his list for the season. But now that he's in the Chase, he has something even bigger to work toward.



By Brian Vickers,
driver of the No. 83 Red Bull Racing Toyota

It would be hard not to be pleased with our season, no matter what happens. With the six poles, the win at Michigan and making the Chase, we met all of our goals this year. But now that we're in the Chase, we want to go win the championship. We're competitors, and that's what we do. Once you reach your goals, you can't just pack up and go home. You've got to keep challenging yourself.

I think those are really lofty goals for a two-year-old team, looking back at the beginning of the year. Now we've got to work toward our long-term goal. If we

do it this year, great. If we do it next year, that's great, too. If we do it three years from now, that's still wonderful. Once we win a championship, our goal is going to be to win two—that's just how it works.

Mark Martin is a huge threat for the championship. A lot of the inconsistencies he's had—some have been performance issues, but most have just been bad luck. I know the feeling. We've been in the same boat. You blow a tire or blow an engine or somebody wrecks in front of you, and you can't avoid it. I think Mark is going to be a threat for the championship, and he may turn out to be the greatest threat for the championship.

— As told to Reid Spencer

NASCAR dialed back its testing policy, but did it go far enough?

The testing policy for the 2010 season represents a modification to the ban adopted for 2009. Teams still can't test at tracks that hold races in any of NASCAR's top three series, but tracks that host regional touring series events are no longer off-limits. That means popular sites such as Greenville-Pickens (S.C.), Tri-County (Hudson, N.C.), South Boston (Va.) and Toyota Speedway at

Irwindale (Calif.), among others, are now available for testing. Three-time defending Sprint Cup Series champion Jimmie Johnson applauds the move but doesn't think it goes far enough.

"It's definitely going to be useful," Johnson says. "I don't think it's the best solution. I still think if we were allowed to test at five or seven tracks that we race on with the right tire, we're going

to learn more useful information and develop the cars and it's going to be a win-win. I still hope that's the direction things go.

"I'm happy to see that it's opened up and we can at least go shake down a car. If the team is out of rhythm, we can go to the track and change some stuff and work new crew guys in."

— Reid Spencer

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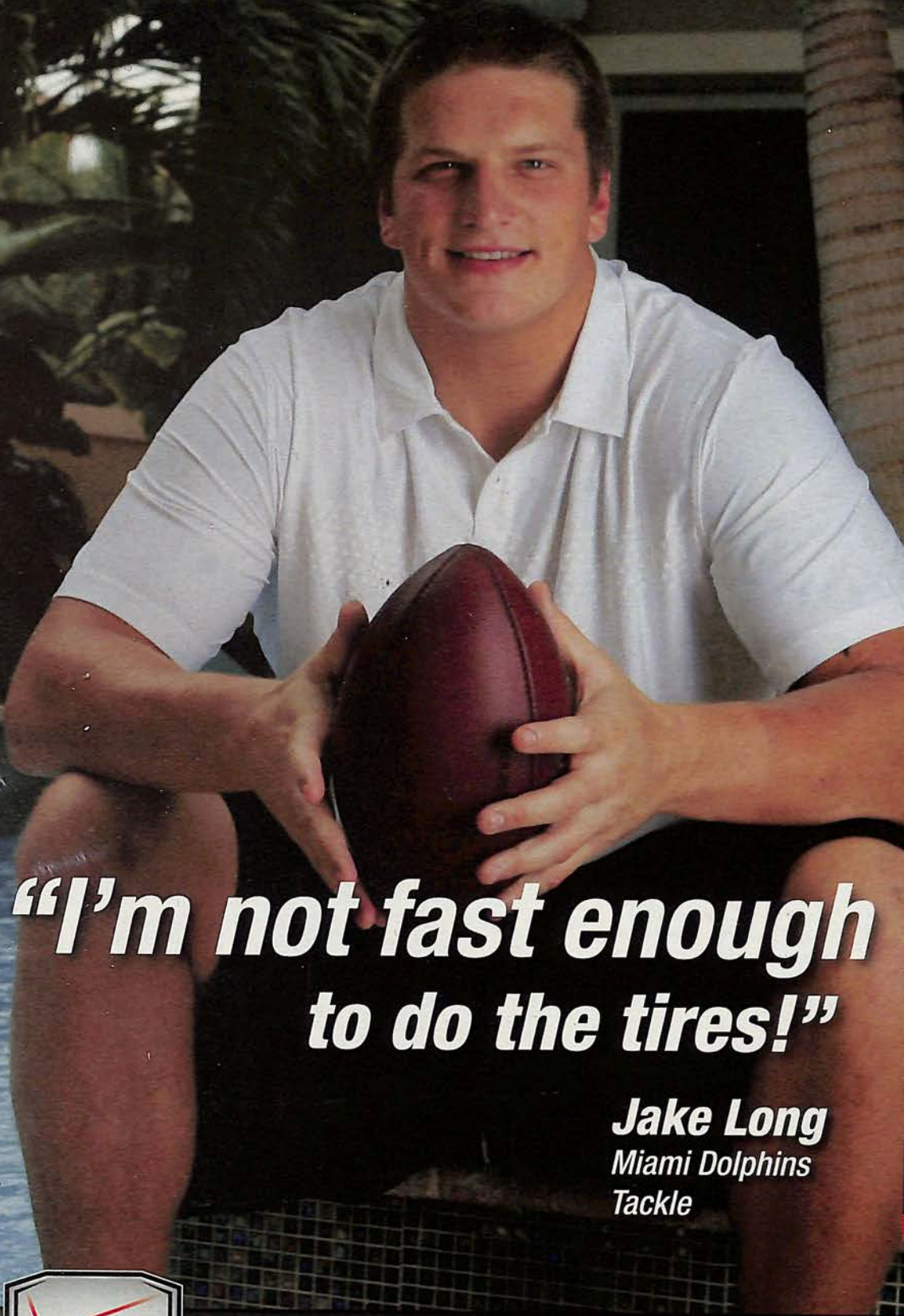
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Sports stars share the thrills and excitement from their first time at the track



**“I’m not fast enough
to do the tires!”**

Jake Long
Miami Dolphins
Tackle

When Was Your First Race? June 20, 2004, DHL 400

Where Did You Attend Your First Race?

Michigan International Speedway

Who Took You To Your First Race? I went with my brothers.

My First Race Was... Amazing! Couldn't believe how fast and close together the cars raced.

The Fans At The Track Were... Rowdy. It was definitely a festive atmosphere.

How Do You Deal With The Noise At The Race? It was really loud there, but I'm used to it. If I can handle a full stadium of fans cheering at a Dolphins home game, I can handle anything!

What's In Your Garage?

Ford F-250 and a Cadillac CTS V-Series

If You Could Have One Job On The Pit Crew What Would It Be? Gasman. I'm not fast enough to do the tires!

What Would Your Racing Number Be? 77

Who Do You Think Has The Hardest Job On Pit Road?

The guy who holds out the sign telling the drivers where to pull in to the pits.

The Racetrack I Hope To Visit One Day... Daytona. Now that I live in Florida, I hope I can make it to that track sometime soon.

What Is Your Favorite Winner's Circle Tradition? Kissing the bricks at Indy... and spraying champagne would be pretty cool.

What Do You Enjoy Most About Being At The Track?

Watching all the passionate fans. There are so many people, sometimes much more than at football games.

Who Is The First Person You Would Text If You Met Your Racing Hero? My brothers.



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Martin just might have a Talladega jinx of his own

Mark Martin says he's taking the Chase for the NASCAR Sprint Cup one week at a time and no race is worth more than the next.

Really?

Then why was he talking about the seventh race of the Chase after winning the first, at New Hampshire?

Because the seventh race is at Talladega, where "The Big One" looms on every lap.

"I didn't mention it in anticipation or anything else," Martin says. "There's a lot of stuff left to happen and a lot of racing left to happen. ... I just brought up (Talladega) because that is a place where you don't really have as much control over your destiny as you do at some of the other places."



With the trouble he has had at the track, Martin (far left) can't help but have one eye on Talladega.

But Martin has never been shy about expressing his distaste for Talladega's white-knuckle, close-quarters racing. An example of his aversion to the track: During his part-time years—2007 and 2008—he skipped the four races at the 2.66-mile superspeedway.

In 43 starts at Talladega, he has two wins, but he has also had his struggles:

- In April 2009, Martin lasted all of six laps before a crash ended his day in his first start at the track since 2006.

- He has six DNFs at the track. Five are crashes, including two in his past four starts.

- He has 11 finishes of 30th or worse.

- In his past 11 races there, Martin's average finish is 27.0, with more DNFs (three) than top 10s (two).

— Reid Spencer



At Richard Petty Motorsports, everything is changing—except Richard Petty

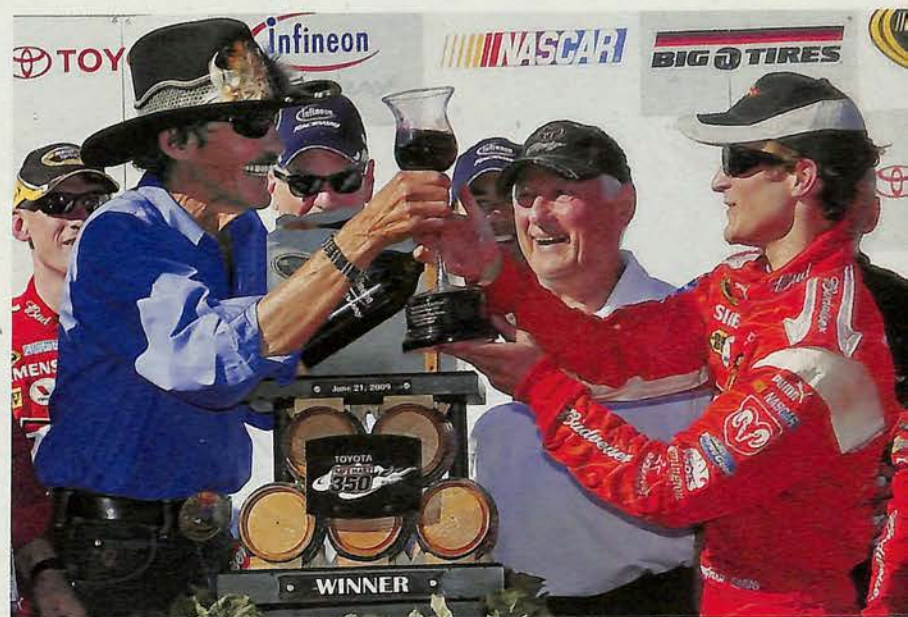
Will the most revered name in stock car racing join forces with a prince from Saudi Arabia? Will Richard Petty Motorsports go through with the pending Yates merger?

Those were the questions facing Richard Petty late last month. Petty Motorsports' proposed merger with Yates Racing had failed to materialize several weeks after the announcement, and RPM majority owner George Gillett disclosed he had signed a commercial collaboration agreement with Saudi Prince Faisal bin Fahd bin Abdullah al-Saud. Gillett has said since that a Saudi organization will never own a majority interest in RPM but that the prince could buy a small stake in the team.

Appearing at Lowe's Motor Speedway, Petty fielded questions about RPM and about the upcoming NASCAR Hall of Fame selections. Petty is one of 25 nominees for the five spots in the inaugural Hall of Fame class, which will be announced October 14.

SN: Are you worried that the confusion surrounding RPM will make it difficult for the team to keep its focus?

PETTY: It makes it pretty tough on (Chase driver) Kasey (Kahne) right now because he's saying, "Am I losing concentration, or is our team losing concentration?" But the basic deal is that the guys have been told that they're OK for the rest of the year and that things are going to work out all



right, and, really, they've probably put in a little extra just to try and prove a point to themselves and to the team.

SN: Do you still expect the Yates Racing merger to go through?

PETTY: We're still in negotiations. So far, they ain't signed nothing, so we're still in negotiations. I feel like, if it went this far, we're going to go forward with it.

SN: How bizarre was it to learn about the deal with the prince?

PETTY: Anything that revolves around Richard Petty is weird anyway. We've started a lot of firsts.

Kahne (right) has won twice this season for Richard Petty Motorsports. But with all the drama surrounding the organization, will he be able to focus down the stretch?

SN: What do you think the criteria should be for who gets into the Hall of Fame?

PETTY: My criteria would be "Who started this stuff?" and "Who were the ones that played the big role and laid the groundwork and took the gamble financially?" ... They didn't ask me for the top 25, either—I'd have given them a different list.

— Reid Spencer

OFF THE TRACK

... with Greg Biffle

- **My first car was ...** A '76 Firebird Trans Am.
- **My dream car is ...** A Saleen S7.
- **The best cruising music is ...** Probably Nickelback or Buckcherry. It's kind of funny. I'm listening to a lot of different stuff now, different stations on Sirius.
- **When I get a flat ...** I cuss like hell—then fix it.
- **The last time I used a GPS was ...** Two days ago.
- **On a scale of 1 to 10, my highway road rage rating is ...** I'd probably be a little below

midgrade. I used to be a little bit more testy, but now, it's like you've got to deal with it.

- **Hybrids are ...** Great. And I think electric technology's great. I don't want to go to the gas station anymore, except when I race.

- **My No. 1 car tip is ...** Check the air in your tires. You'd be amazed how much fuel you waste with underinflated tires.

- **I wouldn't be caught dead in ...** I don't like driving anything but a Ford.

— Reid Spencer

I REMEMBER ...

The Earthquake Series

Just before Game 3 of the 1989 World Series was scheduled to start, the Loma Prieta earthquake hit the San Francisco Bay Area, and the initial jolt was broadcast live on television from Candlestick Park. The October 17, 1989, game was canceled almost immediately, and it was not played until 10 days later. The A's beat the Giants, 13-7, in that game and swept the series the next day. Twenty years later, some of the participants talked to *Sporting News* about their memories of the quake.

◉ **BRETT BUTLER, Giants outfielder:** I was on the line, running sprints, getting ready for the ballgame. It looked like there was just a wave that came through the field. All I was thinking about was getting my family out of the stands.

◉ **TONY LA RUSSA, A's manager:** We were in the dugout. At first, I thought it was just the fans making a lot of noise stepping on the dugout. Then, when I saw the light standards going back and forth, I knew it was serious.

◉ **FAY VINCENT, MLB commissioner:** I had no sense of time. I think I lurched back and forth what seemed to me a couple of minutes (the earthquake lasted approximately 15 seconds). And then it was quiet.

A very few minutes later, out of center field came the squad car. Out of it got a very impressive-looking police commander named Isiah Nelson. He came over to the box, and he said to me, "Commissioner, there's been a very bad earthquake. There's fires burning. There are some bridges down, roads are collapsed. It's a very serious event. I want to talk to you about the baseball game."

I said, "Yes, what about it?"

He said, "I strongly recommend that you cancel the game."

I said, "Commander, the game has just been canceled."

He was the great hero, if there was one, of that day.

◉ **AL ROSEN, Giants G.M.:** I was sitting up in my box. It almost felt like you were on a roller coaster because you're swinging back and forth. My biggest fear was the stadium would somehow crash on all the people sitting below.

◉ **BUTLER:** The one thing that stuck out was the horror on people's faces. They couldn't believe it was happening to

them, that they were in the middle of it.

◉ **BILL BATHE, Giants catcher:** All the lights went out underneath. The emergency lights didn't come on. Guys in the clubhouse were in the middle of getting dressed, and all of a sudden it was pitch-black. They said they could feel it shaking and they could hear the concrete cracking.

A lot of guys who were out on the field didn't even go back and get their clothes. They just left in their uniforms. I went down and felt my way around and got my clothes.

◉ **BUTLER:** All I remember is it was bumper-to-bumper and not being able to get a hold of the person who was watching my children. All the mind monsters run through your mind about what could have happened. *Are they OK? Are they taken care of? Did they leave? Did they take the kids with them? Where did they go?* When we got there, we saw our neighbors had a generator and had gotten them. Everything was fine.

◉ **TODD BURNS, A's pitcher:** After I heard the bridge fell, I thought, *Man, there must have been a bunch of people under there.* I'd sat under there many times. Later, you heard a lot of the businesses closed and they let people out early for the World Series. So there weren't as many people under there as there could have been.

◉ **BATHE:** I stayed in a hotel. I turned everything up—the radio, the TV—even though they didn't work because the power was out, because when it came back on, I wanted to know. I went to sleep. And at about 4 in the morning, all of a sudden, TV, stereo, lights all come back on. I about had a heart attack

because it scared me so bad.

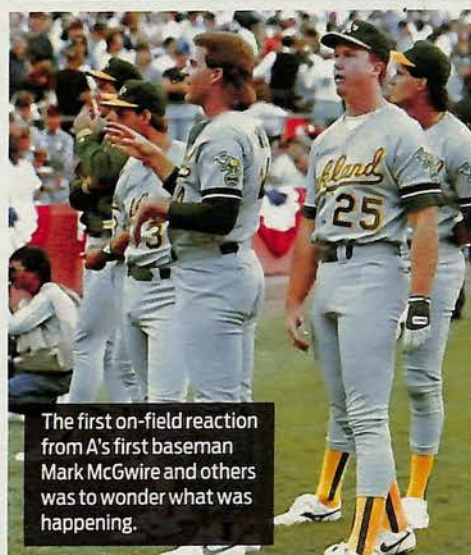
◉ **VINCENT:** A number of writers criticized me for not canceling the whole World Series immediately. I thought of London during the blitz (in World War II), and the idea that Churchill was told, and believed, that it was important to keep the theaters open.

I thought it was important for us to play, if we could play. I thought that would be a symbol of the city getting back on its feet. We waited 10 days and eventually played.

— As told to Matt Crossman



The 1989 World Series will always be remembered for what happened in the Bay Area on the night Game 3 was supposed to be played.



The first on-field reaction from A's first baseman Mark McGwire and others was to wonder what was happening.



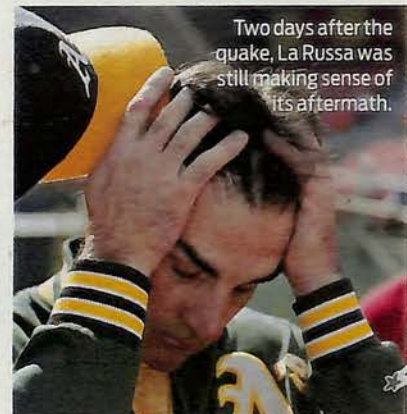
After the shaking stopped, Giants first baseman Will Clark and other players scrambled to find their families as the stadium cleared out.



Vincent (right) postponed Game 3 almost immediately.



The earthquake killed 63 and injured nearly 4,000 people.



Two days after the quake, La Russa was still making sense of its aftermath.

Washington needs a bailout on the diamond



Acclaimed author John Feinstein's most recent book is *Change-Up: Mystery at The World Series*, the fourth in an award-winning series of young adult mysteries. His blog can be found at Feinsteinonthebrink.com.

It was a cool, cloudy late afternoon when the Washington Nationals took the field for their final home game of the season. A crowd that would grow to 23,944 filled a little more than half of Nationals Park as ace John Lannan warmed up.

A glance around the stadium told you exactly what the Nationals are selling these days. Sign up now for Nationals 2010 season-ticket packages, read the signs on the message boards going down both foul lines. There was a website for the superb deals being offered.

"I'm so excited for Monday," team president Stan Kasten said a few minutes earlier. "I'm always sad to see a season end. But Monday is when the 2010 season begins, and, as disappointing as this season has been, I'm excited for next year. I think it will be a breakthrough for us."

What, exactly, would be a breakthrough season for a team that lost 102 games in 2008 and 103 in '09?

"We'll know it when we see it," answered Kasten, long a master of the nonanswer.

What everyone in Washington does

know is this: For a second straight year, the Nats will have the No. 1 pick in June's draft. Stephen Strasburg, this year's touted top pick, will arrive at Nationals Park sometime next season and be expected to be the team's stopper almost right away. He is part of that bright future Kasten is selling.

Of course, this franchise has been selling the future to fans since Maury Wills led off for the Expos against the Mets on April 8, 1969. The future then was a brand-new ballpark, which turned out to be a dud. The team had moments of respectability but made a habit of trading away young talent. The only time the Expos reached the postseason was in the strike season of 1981. They were almost contracted once, played home games in San Juan for two years, were taken over by Major League Baseball and finally moved to Washington to get a new start in 2005.

That first year, playing in rickety old RFK Stadium, the new Nats were in first place in July under Frank Robinson, ended 81-81 and drew 2.7 million fans. The future was bright. MLB sold the team to the Lerner family during the 2006 season, and, after much wrangling, Nats Park began to rise on the Anacostia River. It was all good.

Except that the team kept going in the wrong direction. Robinson was clumsily fired at the end of 2006, and the Lerner family actually cut payroll from what it had been under MLB's ownership. The explanation: They were building for the future with young players. The result: two seasons of 100-plus losses and poor attendance.

"Fans only follow scores, and that's as it should be," Kasten said. "The advantage I have in a year like this is I can focus on things beyond that. We've had two major accomplishments this year: We have identified players who will help us in the long term. And we've identified what we need to get, the pieces we need to fill in during this offseason."

There is no reason the Nationals shouldn't be successful. The ballpark

isn't Camden Yards but is comfortable and pleasant. Thanks to revenue sharing, the franchise is profitable.

There is no doubt that a number of good young players have been identified. Ryan Zimmerman, 25, drove in more than 100 runs and played a very good third base. Adam Dunn drove in 100-plus. Nyjer Morgan, stolen from the Pirates at midseason, was superb in center field. Lannan looks like a legitimate major leaguer, as did Jordan Zimmermann before he got hurt. Strasburg could make it three solid young starters, and Kasten says the team will sign at least one proven veteran pitcher.

The most glaring deficiency is one that isn't often talked about: defense. Washington was simply horrid in the field, leading the National League in errors by a wide margin. And that doesn't take into account plays not made, which on some nights seemed to occur every inning. The team clearly needs fielding help if it is to have its "breakthrough" season.

Of course, the first decision Kasten and Rizzo must make is who will manage the team. The bright Manny Acta was fired at the All-Star break and replaced on an interim basis by Jim Riggleman, who grew up in the area and would love to continue to manage in Washington.

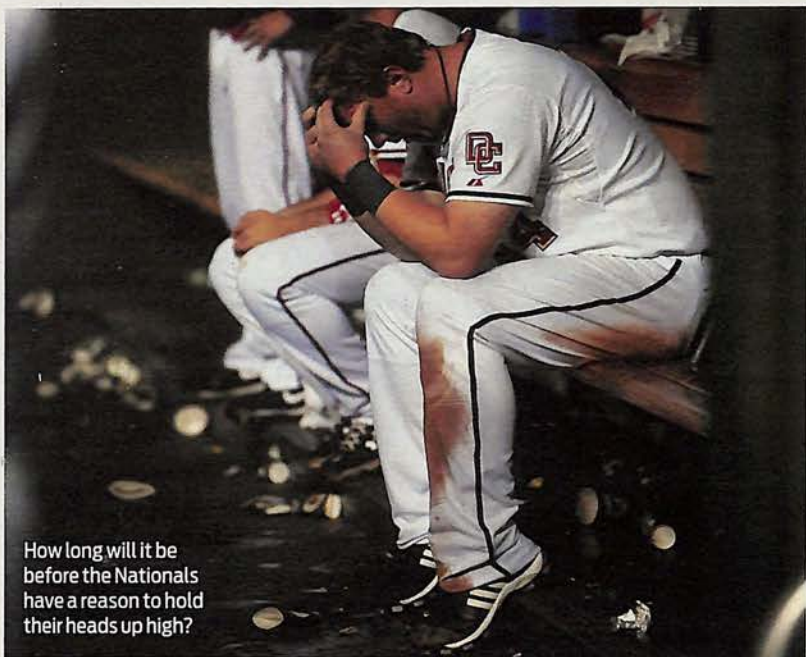
"I remember as a kid when (the Senators) drew 3,000 a game," Riggleman said when asked about the attendance drop. "The support we've gotten, given the way we've played, has been great. ... I'd like to be here when this thing turns around—which I know it will."

But even a baseball lifer like Riggleman admitted the final days haven't been easy. "September's tough," he said. "When you're out of the race and playing teams that are in it, it gets tough."

September had produced a 6-17 record until the bumbling Mets came to town. The home season ended with a three-game Nats sweep, climaxing when Justin Maxwell hit a walkoff grand slam off Francisco Rodriguez.

For one night, the past was forgotten. "We'll get 'em next year," TV analyst Rob Dibble proclaimed on the message board.

How often they will get 'em—and how much they'll spend—remains the question, both now and in the future.



How long will it be before the Nationals have a reason to hold their heads up high?

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